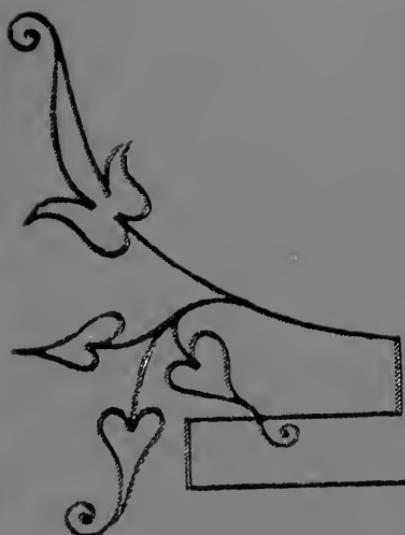
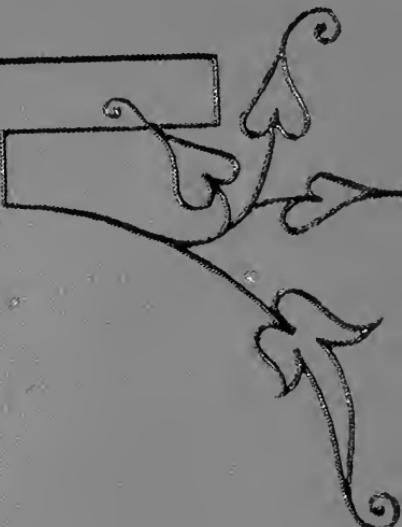


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SADDLE AND SABRE.

SADDLE AND SABRE.

A Novel.

BY

HAWLEY SMART

AUTHOR OF "BREEZIE LANGTON," "FROM POST TO FINISH,"
"BAD TO BEAT," ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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SADDLE AND SABRE.

CHAPTER I.

SHERE ALI THE DACOIT.

A WIDE sandy plain, out of which huge boulders crop in various places, with a torrid afternoon sun still blazing fiercely down upon it—traversed, nevertheless, by a broad but well-used highway, not far from the side of which a tope of palm-trees marks the presence of a spring. In this little oasis of the sandy desert was a small encampment, some half-dozen tents in all. From a marquee, standing a little apart from the

others, emerges a thick-set, powerful man, clothed in the grey kharkee uniform worn by Her Majesty's troops in India when they mean business ; that is to say, it is the dress more especially set aside for campaigning—a pith helmet, around which a puggaree of many folds is twisted, crowned the man's head. For a minute or two he gazed listlessly around, then exclaimed, apparently for the edification of somebody inside the tent—

“ Phew ! how stifling hot it is—here, get up, you lazy young beggar, the sun is beginning to drop, and in another hour the heat will become endurable. We may as well get the horses and ride on to the edge of this plain. Thank heavens ! we shall be across it to-morrow.”

By this time the other denizen of the marquee had made his appearance. Like the first, he is also clothed in grey kharkee, and as he joined his companion remarks, “ All right, Hobson, I am good for a ride

whenever you like ; but I am bound to say this dacoit-hunting is the dullest sport that I ever embarked in. The beggars have no idea of fighting, and they have walked us pretty well off our legs in our endeavours to bring them to book."

"You are quite right," rejoined the other, a veteran captain of rifles, who had been marching and fighting all over India for the last twenty years. "It is all nonsense sending foot-soldiers after these chaps ; cavalry or mounted infantry are the only people to tackle them ; but you make a mistake in one thing, Devereux : you will find these fellows will fight like the very devil if ever we do get them into a corner ; but, like all robbers that I have ever heard of, they naturally don't want to fight if they can help it."

"I suppose," rejoined Charlie Devereux, "this is the chronic state of India, and that our principal employment is the suppression of dacoits, guerillas, or by whatever fancy

name these highway robbers think fit to call themselves."

" Well," rejoined Hobson, laughing, " I won't say but what there is a little of it always going on, but generally not more than the police are able to cope with. What makes them very bad in these parts is this. It is some few years now since the Mutiny, but these fellows are the dregs of that revolt. You see, these are sepoys who were driven to the jungle at that time; their leaders are men we should undoubtedly have hung if we could have laid hands on them, and they no doubt believe we shall do so still; but you need never be afraid in India that you won't see fighting—we have always a little row going on somewhere."

" Oh ! I'm not grumbling," rejoined Charlie; " I only regret that our friends in front are so confoundedly long in the leg."

" Well," rejoined Hobson, " I have got one bit of good news for you: In consequence of my strong representation that we were

marching our men to death, and are still unable to come up with these fellows, we have made an application to mount a company. If it is only granted, I am to have the command and organising of it ; and, on the strength of your having been through the riding-school, I will take you as one of my subalterns, if you like."

" Only too much obliged to you," rejoined Charlie. " By Jove ! if we only get that, we will deuced soon bring these beggars to book then."

" Yes," rejoined Hobson, " it would take a very little while to organize them ; we have only got to pick out the fellows who can ride a bit, and they would be fit to go anywhere in a month. We don't want them drilled up to dragoon pattern. Ah ! here come the horses ; now for our afternoon canter."

Some months have elapsed since Charlie Devereux escaped from his native country. The term " escape " is used advisedly, for

escape it was in the most rigid sense of the word. When Major Braddock took a thing in hand he was wont to go into it very thoroughly. He had interested himself about young Devereux in the first instance at Bertie's request, but he took to the boy kindly on his own account ; a young gentleman who thus early displayed such delicate perception of the art of dining was sure to win his way to the Major's heart. Major Braddock not only interested himself very much about Charlie's exchange, but he also interposed with some sound advice regarding his affairs. The Major was a man of the world, and had more than once, in his soldiering days, intervened between the usurer and his prey.

“ You are very good, I dare say, Bertie ; anybody, of course, can manage the young idiot's affairs better than himself ; but I understand all this sort of thing better than you do. The first thing is to get him out of the country ; when he is safe in India,

Jordan and Co. will be very glad to come to terms; of course they must have back the money he actually borrowed, but we will cut down the percentage pretty extensively. Where is he now?"

"In hiding, out at Hampstead," replied Bertie.

"Well, impress on his mind that he must keep very close, and the sooner he is off the better. He ought to be well on to his way to India before he appears in the Gazette. The minute they see that, Jordan and Co. will understand our little game, and they are safe to ferret him out if he remains in this country."

In good truth the pursuit of Charlie waxed very hot. Furzedon was ceaseless in urging on his emissaries to effect his arrest. He thought that, armed with this engine, he might be able to carry his point with Lettie. She knew that her brother was in sore trouble, but it would come much more home to her if she learnt that he was

actually arrested. Surely, then, she would not hesitate to rescue her favourite brother from the toils of his creditors. Half her world at this minute believed that she was going to marry him, Furzedon. Let her only promise to do so, and he would tear up all these liabilities of Charlie's at once. Surely, when she heard that he was actually imprisoned, that his future as a soldier would be ruined unless he was speedily released, she would not hesitate. But to put extreme pressure upon her it was absolutely necessary that he should lay Charlie Devereux by the heels, and so far his emissaries had failed to trace him ever since his escape from the barracks at York. Still Furzedon looked upon it as a mere matter of time. Devereux's friends apparently had no intention of coming to his assistance. Not the slightest overture had been made to Jordan and Co. on his behalf from any one, and this was a thing which caused Ralph Furzedon no little satisfaction. People, he

knew, did not much care about paying fifteen hundred pounds to rescue a young scapegrace from the results of his own imprudence. Still, if they chose, Furzedon knew very well that either old Tom Devereux or Mrs. Connop could discharge Charlie's liabilities. But one thing Mr. Furzedon had never thought of, and that was his victim exchanging to a regiment on foreign service. He was a man having no knowledge of military matters, and that Charlie Devereux might seek that way of extricating himself from his difficulties never occurred to him, so that when he read in the papers "—th Rifles; Cornet Charles Devereux, from the — Hussars, to be Ensign, vice Rawlins who exchanges," it came upon him like a revelation. Like the American philosopher, he was inclined to exclaim, "Can such things be?" Like Shylock, he was tempted to cry, "Is this law?" but, pulling himself together, he remarked, "My dear Devereux, I am afraid your joining your

new regiment will depend upon what answer your charming sister makes to my suit." He had yet to discover, that, when he read Charlie's name in the Gazette, that young gentleman was on board a P. and O. steamer, within a very few hours' sail of Malta.

But when Furzedon realized that Devereux had escaped his disappointment was very great. It was not that he bore the slightest animosity to his old college chum—far from it; if he had been working ill to Charlie, it was all in furtherance of his cherished design upon Lettice Devereux. He was a man of great tenacity of purpose, not easily to be turned from the pursuit of any object he had set himself to attain, and unscrupulous as to the means by which he compassed his desire. If he had behaved to Charlie after the manner of his kind it was solely with the view of bending Lettice to his will. He was not fond of losing money, but it was not that. The disappointment

was in the fact that he found himself suddenly deprived of what he considered the strongest card in his hand—and he felt assured that except under pressure of some kind Miss Devereux would never consent to be his bride. It was curious that when he first sought her hand he admired her, but was not at all in love with her, and now, despite the knowledge that he had not found favour in her sight, he was wild to marry her. Such was the man's indomitable will, that he did not even yet despair of bringing that about, but he was conscious that a very powerful inducement was now withdrawn from his grasp.

As for Charlie Devereux, it had been with a sad heart that he steamed out of Southampton Waters. He knew that he ought to consider himself very fortunate to have got out of his scrape so far as well as he had—to have saved the commission was of course a great thing, and as Bertie said to him at parting, “When your affairs have

got square, well, you must manage to exchange back to us," and this comforted Charlie not a little, although he knew that it might be by no means easy to accomplish. But he was very sad for all that at leaving his old comrades and the regiment whose gay jacket he had donned so proudly but a few months back. Well, he was young, India was all new to him—and he must just make the best of things. He found his new comrades a right good lot of fellows, and frankly admitted that they were so; but still his sympathies were all with the regiment he had left. A soldier should always believe his own corps to be the very best in the service, and however he may wander about the Army List he usually retains a strong feeling for the regiment under whose colours he first served.

Then again, there was no doubt that Charlie found his new corps engaged in a most monotonous and depressing duty; for the suppression of these dacoits the corps

was broken up into small divisions. It was really arduous police duty, from which there was no honour to be gained, but in which there was a good deal of roughing it and weary marching ; nothing is more irksome than the pursuit of such light-footed marauders as the troops engaged in stamping out the embers of the great Mutiny found to their sorrow. Charlie's soldiering at home had been of the sunniest description. Quartered in one of the pleasantest cities in England, with excellent hunting close by, and the metropolis within an easy distance, his experiences had been very different to the monotonous life he was now living ; not that he cared about the hard work, but there was a want of excitement about it all that he felt so terribly.

“ Never mind, young ‘un,” said Hobson, when his subaltern indulged in a hearty growl at the dulness of their present existence, “ it won’t last for ever ; these fellows are either getting used up or dispersed ;

though our detachment has never had the good fortune to come up with them; still, you know, we hunt them into other people's hands, and if you have any luck you will throw in for a very pretty scrimmage yet before it is all over. From what my scouts tell me, we have got a stag royal in front of us—a fellow who was a man of mark in the Mutiny times—one of Tantia Topee's ablest lieutenants. and what is more he is at the head of a pretty strong band ; now that fellow don't want to fight, but you may depend upon it that whoever does come up with him will find him a stiff nut to crack."

"By Jove, this is getting rather exciting," said the other; "of course we shall beat him."

"Oh yes," rejoined Hobson, "we always do, odds or no odds; all I mean is it won't be a walk over."

"So much the better," rejoined Charlie, who like all young soldiers was just a little bloodthirsty ; "I am keen to see something of fighting in earnest."

“Well, if we chance to come up with Shere Ali he is safe to indulge you ; he is fighting with a rope round his neck, for, though his sins of the Mutiny time might be condoned, yet he has been guilty of too many outrages in the dacoit way, since, to hope for pardon.”

They rode on now for some time in silence, each immersed in his own thoughts ; Hobson gravely considering how he is to get the best of this ubiquitous robber, Shere Ali, upon whose trail you had no sooner got than he speedily vanished to be heard of only again in some other part of the district. Government had decreed that this man should be stamped out like any other vermin, and the ex-soubahdar most richly deserved it. Since he had proved false to his salt he had shown all that tiger ferocity characteristic of the Asiatic when he gets the upper hand. He had been one of the most ruthless lieutenants of Tantia Topee, and since he had become a leader of dacoits had

distinguished himself by the most unrelenting hostility to the Feringhee; such Englishmen, and it was whispered even Englishwomen, who had the misfortune to fall into his hands, had met with scant mercy. This man's hands, it was known, were as deeply imbued in blood as Nana Sahib's, or any of the other savage chiefs who sprang to the front at the time of the great Mutiny. He was quite aware that there was small hope for him should he fall into the hands of the English, and had vowed to wage a war of implacable hostility against the white men.

Charlie's thoughts, on the contrary, reverted to the old country, and the life he had left behind him;—what a fool he had been! What a pleasant career was opened before him but for those miserable gambling debts of his old Cambridge days. He had not heard so often from home as he had expected; and, strangest thing of all, Lettie had never said a word of her

approaching marriage. But, he had also heard from Mrs. Kynaston, and that lady, though alluding to it somewhat vaguely, quite conveyed the idea that the engagement still existed; and Charlie, who, bear in mind, was wholly ignorant of the seamy side of Ralph Furzedon's life, saw no reason why, if Lettie fancied him, it should not be. From Bertie Slade he had also heard but briefly, though satisfactorily: "In the end, Charlie," said Bertie, "your affairs, I have no doubt, will be thoroughly arranged; but your father places implicit reliance on my uncle Bob. Now the Major, you know, is a bit of a martinet, and contends that a decent dose of purgatory should precede the killing of the fatted calf for the prodigal: 'There is nothing like giving these young sinners a tolerable spell of discomfort before you re-establish them; leave the boy out there for a bit, Mr. Devereux, to enjoy the sport of dacoit-hunting, out of which there is not a laurel to be gathered,

but which involves plenty of work and hard knocks. Besides, it will make it all the easier to arrange matters with Jordan & Co. If they think you are ready to settle all your son's liabilities right off they will insist on a settlement in full. If, on the contrary, they see we are in no hurry, they will abate their terms considerably. The longer we wait, the less they will take. Let him stay out in India until he gets his lieutenancy, a matter, probably, of two or three years; and then, I think, we shall find Jordan & Co. likely to listen to reason.' It is good sound advice, Charlie; and, though the chiveying of robbers all over the country is not quite our idea of active service, still I can fancy with what a will you'll go for them when you do catch 'em."

By this time they had reached the edge of the plain, and were now apparently entering a wooded country, at the back of which lay the regular jungle. They were about to dismount from their horses, when "crack"

went three or four rifles, and as many bullets whistled past their ears. Instantly Hobson, wheeling his steed about, and with a cry, "Ride for it, Charlie," set spurs to his horse. Young Devereux followed his example; though, as he did so, he felt something like a hot iron just graze his arm. When he had gone three or four hundred yards Hobson pulled up his horse, and, turning round, deliberately surveyed the spot from whence the fire had come.

"By Jove, Charlie," he exclaimed, "we rode right into the wasps' nest, and it is deuced lucky for us, I fancy, that we rather surprised them; if they had only exercised their usual cunning, we should have been either dead or prisoners by this."

"See," replied Charlie, "there are about a dozen of the beggars on the edge of the wood looking at us."

"Yes," replied Hobson, "it is confoundedly unlucky that we should have come upon them as we did; they will know, of course, that

we have soldiers with us, and before we can get back to camp, or even start, that fellow Shere Ali will have had up sticks and decamped in some other direction. It is thundering unlucky. We really had a chance to come up with him to-night; but, hullo! young man, they have barked you."

"Just a graze," replied Charlie, "but nothing of any consequence; but what will you do now?" "Oh! we must just get back to camp as quick as we can, and then start in pursuit of our friends; my only hope is that, by perpetually harrying them, we shall drive Shere Ali straight into the hands of one of the other parties out in pursuit of him;" and with that, Hobson put his horse into a gallop, and the pair made their way back to camp as speedily as might be.

CHAPTER II.

DOINGS ON THE KNAVESMIRE.

WE must now go back a little bit in this history to see how events have fared with people in England. Gilbert Slade had been very little in London since that famous Derby, which had utterly broke Devereux. He had run up for a week to help Charlie with his advice in the arrangement of his affairs, and he had also come up for a few days to see him off and bid him God-speed on his departure for India, which had taken place about the end of July; otherwise Gilbert Slade had seen nothing of London that year. He had called upon nobody during those brief visits. He was up strictly

on business, and had no wish to advertise his presence in the metropolis. He had never made his appearance in Onslow Gardens, nor, sorely to the disappointment of Mrs. Kynaston, had she ever set eyes upon him since that brief visit he paid her in May. With every reason to believe in Miss Devereux's engagement with Furzedon, Bertie had thought it useless to call on Mrs. Connop. Twice he had done so during that Derby week, and upon each occasion had been met with a "not at home." He had come to the conclusion that this was a distinct intimation that they wished to see no more of him. While he was making up his mind, another had stepped in and carried off the prize. If it had only been any other than Furzedon he could have borne it better, but that, even with all his money, Miss Devereux could marry such a man as that was incomprehensible in Bertie's eyes ; but it was all over now, and for the present, as men do under such circumstances, Gilbert

Slade thoroughly realized the hollowness of London society. One morning in September, shortly before the Doncaster races, Bertie received a letter from his uncle Norman, in which he said “I shall be at York this week for a couple of nights ; I shall stay at the ‘Black Swan,’ and shall throw myself upon your hospitality for dinner ; your regiment has the reputation of doing that sort of thing rather well, and I have no doubt you can make up a rubber for me afterwards. An hotel coffee-room is rather a dull place to put in an evening alone.”

“ Give uncle Norman a dinner ! I should rather think so,” muttered Bertie to himself on reading this note, “ I would put him up for a whole week, and be only too glad to do so ; but I am puzzled as to what brings him to York just now. Uncle Norman at York during the races is natural enough, but uncle Norman at York the second week in September is a mystery.” However, what-

ever might be Norman Slade's object in turning up in the great city of the north, his nephew took care that there should be a note for him at the "Black Swan," saying that he should be only too glad to see him every day during his stay; and that if it would be the slightest convenience he could put him up very comfortably to boot. In due course Norman Slade turned up at the mess of the —th Hussars, and was regarded with due reverence by the younger members of that sporting regiment as a sort of incarnation of all Turf knowledge, and a man who, if he chose, could make wondrous revelations on the subject of races past, present, and to come. When he chose, as we know, Norman could make himself extremely pleasant, and upon this occasion he won golden opinions. The Colonel, in particular, was enchanted with his guest, who manifested the greatest possible interest in the regiment. One thing especially was he curious in, and that was, would he have an

opportunity of seeing the regiment out? Did they not exercise on the Knavesmire in the early mornings at times?

“Yes,” replied the Colonel, “but we are not so very early—during this hot weather we begin at seven, and so get our drill over before the heat of the day.”

“Then,” rejoined Norman, “if I am on the Knavesmire sharp seven, I shall be in time to see your fellows exercise.”

“In plenty of time, Mr. Slade,” said the Colonel; “indeed, a quarter past will be quite time enough. If you will allow me I will have a horse there already for you.”

“You are very good,” rejoined Norman, “but I have no doubt Bertie can manage all that for me”—to which speech Bertie returned a somewhat bewildered assent.

“Very good, then,” replied the Colonel; “and now, Mr. Slade, if you won’t take any more wine, what do you say to a rubber and a cigar?”

“I should like it of all things,” replied

the other, rising. Norman Slade, indeed, had astonished Her Majesty's —th Hussars not a little. Although Bertie had given a hint to the chief and some of his own immediate chums that his uncle was not given to racing talk, they could not believe that a man who occupied such a leading position on the Turf should absolutely abstain from the slightest allusion to that sport, either in the past or the present; while Bertie on his part was just as much astonished at the extraordinary interest his uncle had suddenly developed in military matters. "I can understand," said Bertie, to one of his chums, "his not talking Turf—he never does—I can understand his preferring a dinner with us and a rubber afterwards to the solitude of the 'Black Swan,' but his wanting to see the regiment out beats me altogether. I never knew my uncle before take the faintest interest in soldiering, and should have just as soon thought of asking him to the regimental ball as to a regimental

field-day." However, after a couple of *partis* at whist, Norman Slade rose to take his departure, simply remarking, "These early hours in the morning, Colonel, require correspondingly early hours at night," and then, thanking his host for a very pleasant evening, Norman Slade stepped into his fly and was driven back to his hotel.

The morning came, and seven o'clock saw the —th Hussars filing through the gate that led on to the Knavesmire; that passed, they formed up, and at once commenced the morning's drill. Bertie's servant with a horse was left at the gate, with instructions to await the arrival of Mr. Slade, who was to drive out from York in a fly. Soon the Hussars were skirmishing, charging, and going through all manner of evolutions, and more than once both the Colonel's and Bertie's eyes wandered about in search of their pleasant guest of the night before. But there was not a sign of Norman Slade, and as they once more filed through the

gate—their morning's work over—on their way back to barracks, Bertie's servant assured them that the gentleman had never put in an appearance. It was incomprehensible. It seemed impossible that there could have been any mistake—and yet what could have become of Norman Slade? He was, apparently, most anxious last night to see the regiment out in the morning, and yet, although a horse had been brought there expressly for him, although he had been told the exact time and everything else, he had never put in an appearance; neither the Colonel nor Bertie could perceive how it was possible that a mistake could have occurred. In the course of the morning a note was brought to Bertie in which his uncle said that he was unfortunately prevented coming out to the Knavesmire that morning, and, more unlucky still, that business required him to leave York that morning for the north by the eleven train. “ Make my apologies to

the Colonel for not turning up this morning, and, if you can, meet me at the station a little before the train starts." It was all very mysterious; however, Bertie at once determined that there was only one thing to be done, and that was to meet his uncle as suggested, and say good-bye to him.

At a quarter before eleven Bertie Slade made his appearance at the York station, where he found his uncle already pacing up and down the platform. "Why, what on earth became of you, uncle Norman, this morning? we were all on the look-out for you on the Knavesmire, and never saw you."

Norman's eyes twinkled at his nephew's speech. "No," he said, "you were a little late for me. I had gone home before you came."

"What on earth do you mean?" ejaculated the other speaker.

"I mean this," said Norman. "I had ascertained that you fellows were given to

early drills on the Knavesmire, and I had the best of all possible reasons for wishing to know exactly when you would be there."

"I don't understand," said Bertie.

"Well, my dear boy, *I tried Belisarius for the Leger this morning*, and I didn't want the whole of Her Majesty's —th Hussars to be present at the trial—do you understand now, Bertie?" Bertie's answer was simply a roar of laughter, and then he exclaimed, "Sold us all, by Jove! I hope it was satisfactory?"

"I will say no more, but it is good enough for you to stand in a pony with me—they got at the man last time, but I will take deuced good care that they don't this."

"Yes, I heard something about this in London, and, what is more, happened to get at the names of two of the principal winners over the defeat of Belisarius."

"What are their names?" inquired Slade sharply.

"Major Kynaston and a Mr. Furzedon—

both men I have met and don't think much of. Didn't you hear a rumour that Bill Smith was given a drugged glass of wine in the Paddock after he got up?"

"Hear the rumour!" exclaimed Norman Slade excitedly. "I saw it done, and, though I don't know him, could swear to the man that gave it. I know all about Kynaston, he is rather a shy card, but I don't think that he would go the length of hoccusing a jockey; besides, I will swear he was not the man who handed that glass to Bill. As for Furzedon, I never saw him—but here is my train—we must have some more talk about this—mind you come to Doncaster."

"All right, uncle, I will come up to see Belisarius have another shy. Furzedon will most likely be there, and, if so, I will point him out to you."

"Do," said Norman, "and if I can work the thing out I will bring the whole case before the Jockey Club. Once more, good-bye," and the two cordially shook hands.

Norman Slade as he sped rapidly back to Bellaton Wold pondered a good deal over what Bertie had just told him. True, he had seen that fatal glass given to Bill Smith in the Paddock at Epsom ; had he not interfered and insisted upon drinking a glass out of the same bottle ? That wine was not drugged, or he also must have felt the effects of it, and, if Smith in accordance with his besetting weakness had been unable to withstand the temptation of a glass too much, then there would be no call for the interference of the Jockey Club in the matter. An intemperate man had failed to keep sober in order to ride his own horse in the great race of the year, and there was no more to be said. It was of more moment to him, Bill Smith, than any one, and as for the misguided public who chose to pin their faith on a drunken jockey trainer they had only themselves to blame for their exceeding folly.

This time Norman Slade and Sir Ronald had determined not to let the bibulous Bill

out of their guardianship. They knew from bitter experience that when once he had broken out and given way to drink he got beyond all control, but that if carefully watched over from the first it was possible to restrain him. It was during that unlucky week when neither Norman Slade nor Sir Ronald had been able to keep guard over him that Bill Smith got so completely out of hand before Epsom, but this time there had been no relaxation of vigilance. Norman Slade had taken up his abode at Bellaton immediately after Goodwood, and Sir Ronald had also been a frequent visitor. Bill Smith had never been left by himself for some weeks past, and, though there was no such golden harvest to be reaped at Doncaster as might have been gathered at Epsom, still both Slade and the baronet had managed to back Belisarius for the St. Leger to win themselves a nice stake. Although the racing fraternity knew, that, as far as Smith's horse went, the Derby run-

ning was not to be relied on, yet the general public only knew that Belisarius had been well beaten in the big race. Rumours of course there were that his rider had been drunk, but then excuses were always made for a prominent favourite when he failed to realise the expectations formed of him, and so, though the bookmakers would offer no great price against the north-country horse, in consequence of the public not fancying him, the odds against him were larger than might have been expected.

Another thing too that still further expanded the price at which Belisarius stood for the great Doncaster race was due in part to accident, and in part to a piece of Turf strategy suggested by Norman Slade. Fearing that the horse-watchers who infested Bellaton Wold should get knowledge of their proceedings, Slade had suggested that the trial of Belisarius just previous to the St. Leger should take place at York, and this manœuvre had been attended with

complete success. Belisarius had been tried over the Knavesmire, and acquitted himself to the entire satisfaction of all connected with him, and, what is more, without any of the few spectators being a bit the wiser, they indeed being unaware of what horses they were; whilst there occurred another thing which Slade had not foreseen, namely, that the horse-watchers of Bellaton Wold telegraphed to their employers that Belisarius had not left his stable, which to the racing world meant that there was something amiss with him. When a horse is stopped in his work a week before a big engagement it is usually the presage of his defeat, and consequently it was not surprising that the bookmakers extended their offers against Belisarius. Flushed by the successful issue of the trial, Slade and Sir Ronald took this opportunity of again backing the horse on more favourable terms, the Baronet in particular laying out a considerable sum of money to—as he said—recoup

him for his Epsom disappointment; and a few days later saw the little coterie on the Doncaster Town Moor, trusting to see Belisarius redeem his laurels.

The Wednesday dedicated to the great race of the North came at last and saw Bertie Slade and several of his brother officers all bound for Doneaster. “If you fellows want to bet,” said Bertie, “you had better wait till I have seen my uncle, and, if he says Belisarius and his jockey are all right, I think you will find him good enough to have a flutter on!” and it was accordingly settled amongst that little band of Hussars, that, if Norman Slade spoke favourably, they should all indulge in a joint plunge upon that noble animal. Bertie, indeed, had been unable during the railway journey to resist explaining the cause of his uncle Norman’s sudden interest in cavalry manœuvres. “Couldn’t make it out at all,” said Bertie; “his military knowledge goes no further than just knowing a horse-soldier

from an infantry man"—and then Bertie told his story—which elicited roars of laughter. Arrived at the course, Bertie made his way straight to the Paddock, where, as he rightly conjectured, he found his uncle.

"You will have a good run for your money to-day," said Norman, as they shook hands; "both horse and man are thoroughly fit, and I think you will see that the Two Thousand form was right, and not the Derby."

"All right! Excuse me, I'll be back in a minute, but I promised to let some of our fellows know if you fancied Belisarius."

"Tell them I do," rejoined Norman curtly.

Bertie hurried across the Paddock and told that little syndicate that had been formed in the train that they might commence operations at once; that his uncle thought Belisarius would about win; that it was the jockey not the horse who lost the

race at Epsom, and that this time Bill Smith was sober as the traditional judge. As Bertie made his way back again he met Furzedon, who would have fain stopped and spoken, but Bertie passed him with a nonchalant nod, and rejoined his uncle.

“I told you Furzedon would be at Doncaster. I have just met him. I will point him out to you presently.”

“Ah, do,” replied Norman Slade. “I should like to see him. Bill Smith still sticks to it that last glass of wine he had was drugged. He admits he was the worse for liquor, but declares that he was hocussed to boot. Now, I know he was drunk and that the wine in that bottle was not doctored, for I drank a glass of it. Of course it does not follow that there was not something dropped into Smith’s glass, but I cannot prove it.”

“Surely some of the gang with the giver of that last glass were privy to it if it was so?”

“ No doubt,” said Norman ; “ but I don’t know how to get at them.”

“ Whenever a lot of scoundrels have been engaged in a transaction of this sort one of them is safe to turn Queen’s evidence,” said Bertie. “ The story is safe to come to your ears before long ; but here comes our man. That’s Furzedon, uncle Norman.”

“ By Heavens, the very fellow ; that’s the man who handed Bill Smith the glass of wine in the Epsom paddock — ”

“ And was one of the largest winners over the defeat of Belisarius,” commented Bertie.

CHAPTER III.

THE ST. LEGER.

SPURRED on by his hatred of Furzedon, Mr. Prance has been untiring in his endeavours to unravel the whole history of Belisarius's defeat at Epsom; or, to speak more properly, of the drugging of Bill Smith, which led to it. The story was current enough amongst the lower order of professional racing-men; and Prance had, with some little trouble, got at the names of the very men who had been employed to ply the reckless jockey with liquor. It was not difficult to scrape an acquaintance with them, and Prance speedily ascertained that they conceived themselves to have been by no

means liberally dealt with by Furzedon, and were quite willing to tell all they knew to any one who would make it worth their while. This question of money, however, put an insurmountable bar to further investigation for the present, although Mr. Prance anticipated no difficulty about procuring the requisite funds when he should deem it expedient to launch his thunderbolt against the object of his detestation. He was quite aware that he must get hold of somebody of standing and position to bring forward such a charge as this. No one would even listen to such a story from the lips of a nameless vagrant like himself; and he thought that whoever he induced to take up the case would make no demur to finding the necessary funds to unloose the tongues of his witnesses. He had, in the first instance, fixed upon Sir Ronald Radcliffe as the instrument of his vengeance. He knew that the Baronet had lost a considerable sum by the overthrow of Belisarius; and his status

as a racing-man made him a very fit person to take up the case. He had found no difficulty in attaining access to Sir Ronald ; for, like Major Kynaston, that sporting gentleman was accustomed to receive strange visitors ; but the interview had proved by no means satisfactory.

“ I don’t believe your story,” rejoined the philosophical and somewhat cynical Baronet. “ You say you have witnesses who demand to be paid before they will testify. As Shakespeare hath it, ‘ that makes against you ’ ; but, secondly, we’ll suppose it all true, what the devil does it all matter to me ? The race was lost, and our money has been paid. Whether Bill Smith was drunk, or drugged, or both, makes but little difference. Pooh ! my good fellow, I’m not going to trouble myself with unearthing a dead scandal like this. Your best chance is to try and drive a bargain with a sporting newspaper ; it might suit them to buy it all up as copy for the dead season, now fast

approaching. That will do, my good fellow ! Your narrative has no interest for me." Mr. Prance walked down the staircase of Sir Ronald's house considerably depressed in spirits. He had counted confidently on the Baronet at once taking up the case hotly. "He forgot that Sir Ronald had no personal vengeance to gratify, and that the race was, as he says, a thing of the irrevo- cable past, the which there was no undoing ; and now Mr. Prance was non-plussed to whom to apply. He knew Norman Slade by name ; but Norman was a man who was seldom a prominent figure on a race- course. He passed most of his time in the Paddock, and was given to looking on at a race from the trainers' stand—inner pre- cincts which impecunious vagabonds like Prance are not privileged to enter. He had had a tolerably successful year, and, in conse- quence, was in possession of more money than usual ; still it was a firm part of his scheme that his vengeance should be carried

out at some one else's expense: and when Mr. Prance arrived at Doncaster he by no means saw his way towards this.

He was wandering vaguely down the course, trying to make up his mind as to whether he should invest his stake on Belisarius, whom two or three of his fraternity had informed him would be sure to reverse the Epsom running. More prudent he thought to wait till he saw Bill Smith in the saddle and could assure himself that the jockey was fit to ride, when suddenly his eye fell on a cardboard ticket close to his feet. Mr. Prance at once pounced on it—it was probably, he thought, an admission to the Stand; he was not far wrong, but instead of the Stand it was a ticket for the Paddock. Most racing-men are more or less superstitious, and Prance hailed this bit of luck as a good augury, and without more ado made his way to that privileged inclosure which of late years he had never penetrated. It was the very thing he wanted. He would

doubtless see Bill Smith inside, as well as the horse, and be able to judge for himself of their condition. Once inside the Paddock Prance had no difficulty in finding what he wanted. Belisarius was walking up and down, and round him were gathered a little knot, two of whom Prance at once recognised. One was the famous north-country jockey, and upon this occasion there could be no doubt that he was in a very different state from that in which he had appeared at Epsom ; the other was Sir Ronald Radcliffe ; the remainder of the group were unknown to Prance, though the keen, dark, saturnine features of Norman Slade were not easy to forget by any one who had once seen them. Mr. Prance's mind was at once made up upon one point, to wit, that Belisarius was worth backing to-day ; but, as the saddling-bell had not yet rung, there was plenty of time for that, and Mr. Prance took advantage of his good fortune to inquire the names of such nota-

bilities as were unknown to him by sight; most especially anxious, for example, to know all those in that group of which Bill Smith was the centre. There were plenty of people there who could tell him who Norman Slade was, and Prance became at once deeply interested in that gentleman. Could this be the man he was looking for? It is a stern, unforgiving face, thought Prance. A man little likely to forgive those who had done aught to his detriment. He never recollects having seen him before, but he had heard him spoken of; he knew that he was a great supporter of Bill Smith, and he further knew that he was a loser over the Derby. Perhaps he could induce this Mr. Slade to take up the case against Furzedon. At all events he must try, for he could think of no one else now that Sir Ronald had failed him. However, it would be time enough to think of all this after the race. If there should be no opportunity, as was most likely, of tell-

ing Mr. Slade the whole story at Doncaster, he would doubtless be enabled to obtain access to him in London. At all events, he would find out where he lived and whether he was willing to help him wreak his vengeance on Furzedon. Mr. Prance was a man of decision ; he dashed out of the Paddock, and, making his way to the outer ring, at once made his investment on Belisarius, and then sought some coign of vantage from which to see the race. The St. Leger of that year only proved to the backers of Belisarius how their money had been thrown away at Epsom, and the story of the race may be told in very few words. Bill Smith, on his favourite battle-ground, and upon this occasion strictly sober, occupied a prominent position all the way up to the Red House turn, and no sooner was he round that than he took his horse to the front, was never again reached, and landed Belisarius a winner by a good three lengths.

“ Ah ! ” exclaimed Mr. Prance, as he

jumped off the rough stand, for the occupation of a foot-hold on which he had been mulcted of the sum of one shilling, "if that don't make Sir Ronald and Mr. Slade feel heavenly I don't know what will. When they think of all the money that ought to have gone into their pockets last May, and remember that it went out instead, they must surely feel rather wolfish about it, and be hungry to punish the man who huccussed their jockey. Mr. Slade, at all events, don't look one of the forgiving sort."

No sooner had he been paid his winnings than Prance once more repaired to the Paddock with the object of getting speech with Norman Slade, which he thought, the big race being satisfactorily got through with, would be now easy to accomplish. The racecourse, as Mr. Punch once observed of the hunting-field, "brings people together who would *not otherwise meet*," and certainly affords opportunity to such men as Prance

to address their betters if they can only come across them, and this the fortunate finding of the Paddock-ticket had placed within that worthy's power. Bill Smith's triumph had been received with very moderate cheering, and not with that "Yorkshire roar" with which the big county was wont to proclaim the victory of the North over the South country horses. Too many of the Tykes had suffered over the Epsom business to feel much enthusiasm about the success of Belisarius on the Town Moor, and Bill Smith was not a little nettled at missing the ovation which usually greeted his winning the St. Leger. Even the impassive Sir Ronald could not suppress a groan as he thought of that lost golden opportunity on Epsom Downs.

The baronet, however, having congratulated Bill Smith on his victory, speedily returned to the Grand Stand to chat over the race with his friends, and speculate on the following events, and this gave Prance

the opening he wanted. He did not wish to speak before Sir Ronald, but no sooner was the baronet's back turned than he walked up to Norman, and touching his hat said, "Can I have a word with you, Mr. Slade?"

Accustomed to be addressed on a race-course not unfrequently by persons of whom he had no knowledge, Norman replied curtly, "All right, what is it?"

"You saw what won to-day, sir. You know what ought to have won at Epsom."

"If you have merely to tell me that Belisarius ought to have won the Derby, but didn't, because his jockey was drunk, you are a little behind-hand with a well-known story. All the world's known that for some time."

"Bill Smith was more than drunk, sir; he was drugged. You know the man that did it, for I'm told you saw it done."

"I saw him given that last glass of wine in the Paddock—if you mean that. I suspected it might be so, and I insisted on

having a glass out of the same bottle. I know it was not changed for I never took my eye off it—that wine was not drugged!"

"Not the wine you drank, sir, but the wine Bill Smith drank was! They didn't change the bottle, but they did the glass."

"You know that? You can prove what you assert?"

"I can prove it, sir," replied Prance. "This Furzedon was one of the heaviest layers against Belisarius for the Derby. I can bring you the men he employed to make Smith drunk, but at the last moment his nerve failed him, and he was afraid that would not be sufficient to prevent the horse winning. He ordered them to drug him besides, but they were afraid to do that, and so at the last moment he was compelled to do the hoccusing himself. Of course they were with him, and helped him, and saw the phial emptied into the glass. Surely, sir, such a robbery as this ought to be exposed!"

A queer smile flitted around Slade's mouth as he replied, "And these friends of yours would be willing to give evidence confirmatory of all this, I presume?"

"Certainly, they would, if they thought there was any probability of the case being taken up; but they are poor men, Mr. Slade."

"Ah! and don't speak unless they are paid for it," interrupted Norman, sharply. "Now, sir! first of all, what's your name? and secondly, why do you come to me at this time of day?"

"To begin with, my name is Prance, and secondly, it took me a long time to collect the proofs of what I only suspected."

"Good!" rejoined Slade, "it looks a little to me as if you and your confederates, having made all that you possibly could out of a successful conspiracy, are now exceedingly anxious to put the coping-stone on your villainy by selling your employer."

"I give you my word, Mr. Slade, that I

had nothing to do with it, and knew nothing about what was being done till after the race," rejoined Prance, earnestly.

"Then what the deuce is your object in coming to me?" said Norman, sharply.

For a second Prance hesitated, then, as an almost demoniacal expression spread across his countenance, he hissed between his teeth.

"*I hate Furzedon!*"

Slade looked at him for a moment, and then exclaimed, almost involuntarily, "By heaven, he is speaking the truth now."

"Yes!" continued Prance, in a voice hoarse with passion, "you gentlemen think that we poor devils care for nothing but money, but there's one thing that comes far before money to most men—revenge! Furzedon has ruined me! struck me! desolated my home! and for years I have lived only to be revenged upon him!"—

"That will do for the present," replied Slade quietly; "if you can prove what you

say, and I take this case up, I think, socially speaking, you will about attain your end."

"Yes," replied Prance, "and I have a good deal more to tell you about him than that. He passes in the world as a wealthy, well-to-do gentleman; in reality he is only a money-lender."

"Give me your address," rejoined Slade, and as he spoke Norman took his betting-book from his pocket, and carefully noted down Mr. Prance's town residence. "I have no time to go into the matter here, but I will write to you in London, and if I am satisfied with the proofs you produce and that your story is *bonâ fide*, I think I can at all events promise you that Mr. Furzedon will be warned off the Turf, and be no longer received in decent society."

"Thank you, sir," and touching his hat Mr. Prance accepted his dismissal, and with an exultant heart vanished into the crowd.

As for Norman Slade he paced up and down in the Paddock, revolving the whole story in

his mind for some minutes. He had vowed if he could but get proof of this thing to follow up the matter to its bitter end, and here was proof ready to his hand, if Prance's tale was to be trusted. This scoundrel Furzedon, moreover, was figuring in society, and had actually forced an acquaintance upon Bertie Slade, his—Norman's—nephew. Now it was high time the disguise was torn off this impostor. This fraudulent money-lender should be shown up in his true colours, and, if he was beyond the reach of the ordinary law, he was still open to the judgment of the Turf Senate, and if when the facts were brought before them they should think fit to pass sentence, Mr. Furzedon would find that there were mal-practices in racing that could not be committed with impunity.

CHAPTER IV.

SINISTER RUMOURS.

CHARLIE's exile is a source of sore trouble to Lettie Devereux, and of infinite mortification to her aunt. They both, perhaps, unduly exulted at that young scapegrace's appointment to the —th Hussars. They had been so proud of their young dragoon ! and now that was all over. He was in a far country, engaged in what was apparently little better than police-work. Mrs. Connop, indeed, had been so melted by what she called the misfortunes of her favourite nephew that she had been ready to contribute very handsomely towards extricating him from his difficulties; if her brother

would furnish two-thirds of the requisite money, she would find the remainder; but old Tom Devereux, taking counsel from shrewd and worldly Major Braddock, was obstinate. Charlie had made his own bed, and must lie on it. Major Braddock was by no means averse to welcoming a return of the prodigal in due season; but what he did object to was a premature mincing of veal in his behalf.

“No such schoolmaster as experience!” quoth the Major. “Let him feel thoroughly for a time the change of position his folly has cost him. Let him discover what slow work chevying dacoits is compared to a gallop with the York and Ainsty! and, by the Lord! sir, let him know the difference of living on his rations and dinner at the mess of his old regiment.”

So Lettie had to make up her mind that a long time would pass before she should see her favourite brother again. That he was dissatisfied with his lot she felt certain,

although there was not the slightest complaint in any one of his letters ; but there was a want of go in his correspondence very different from the bright, cheery epistles of yore ; very different from the letters he had written from the University, or those he penned when he first joined his regiment at York : once only had he been betrayed into impatience of his present life, and that was when he said “ that he only wished that he had better work to do than that he had been employed in.” Another thing, too, which considerably discomposed Miss Devereux was that Gilbert Slade seemed to have totally disappeared from her ken. She not only never met him, she never even heard of him now. She was back again at North Leach, and, indeed, had been for some time ; but how different it all was from the winter before ! when Charlie was looking forward to joining his regiment at York, and bringing back Bertie Slade with him to wind up the season by a last fortnight with the Brock-

lesby ; and then Lettie thought the world was getting very dull, as we all do when things don't run quite in accordance with our desires, and finally resolved that she would ride across and see Kate Kynaston, for the Kynastons had once more taken The Firs for the hunting season ; and, though there had been a relaxing of that great friendship which had suddenly sprung up between that lady and herself, still, strange to say, a common trouble had once more drawn them together. Mrs. Kynaston had schemed and plotted successfully—she had succeeded in detaching Gilbert Slade altogether from Miss Devereux, but she had also unluckily lost touch of him herself. She had failed to realise that both she and Lettie owed in great measure their intimacy with Bertie Slade chiefly to his being a brother officer of Charlie, and that now that youthful cornet had disappeared from the scene they heard no more of Gilbert's movements. Both ladies thought — and

Lettie with good reason—that she for her own sake would have proved sufficiently attractive to ensure seeing and hearing a good deal of him, while Kate Kynaston's vanity enabled her to take a similar view of the situation. Miss Devereux wondered whether the rumour that she was engaged to be married to Mr. Furzedon had anything to say to Gilbert Slade's persistent avoidance of her—avoidance was perhaps hardly the right term, for he had certainly tried twice to see her during the Derby week; still, he could have managed to meet her easily enough had he wished it; he could have found plenty of excuses for writing to her; but no, from the week he had paid those two bootless visits to Onslow Gardens Gilbert Slade had given no sign of his very existence. She knew how persistently the story of her engagement had been circulated; of the shameful persecution—for it amounted to that—she had been subjected to by Mr. Furzedon. Was it not possible this infamous

falsehood had been brought designedly to Gilbert Slade's ears, and would not that account for his never coming near her?

She might have been more disposed to accept this theory but for Mrs. Kynaston, who was continually impressing upon her that in affairs of the heart soldiers were not to be put faith in. A great propounder of the doctrine that "he loves and rides away" was Mrs. Kynaston, but then, just now, she had a purpose to serve, and she was relentless in her determination to crush out any feeling for Gilbert Slade that might be lurking in Miss Devereux's bosom. True, Mrs. Kynaston was not forwarding her own flirtation in any way. And, what was more, although that lady had not in the least abated her caprice for Gilbert Slade, she was utterly nonplussed as regards further pursuit of it. It was not likely that the fiction of Lettie's engagement to Mr. Furzedon could be much longer kept up; and Mrs. Kynaston had only the other day been compelled

to write that gentleman a stinging rebuke for what she denominated his ill-advised audacity. Persistent in his determination to marry Miss Devereux, Furzedon had actually written to her father, and volunteered a visit to North Leach; but, upon hearing this, Lettie blazed out indignantly—

“It can’t be, father! it *musn’t* be! He has asked me to marry him, and he won’t take ‘No’ for an answer. Already he has spread abroad the report that I am engaged to him. His proposing this visit is all a part of his scheme. It would give an air of truth to the rumour. If he was a gentleman he would cease from persecuting me. My ‘*No!*’ was not only said clearly and distinctly to start with, but has been quite as decisively repeated.”

“Say no more, Lettie! If he is distasteful to you, my girl, he shan’t come to North Leach. But as he is an old friend of Charlie we must make some civil excuse.”

Although in the first instance Mrs. Ky-

naston had been the suggester and promoter of Furzedon's suit, yet now that she had attained her end she had become a very half-hearted ally. She began to see now that nothing was likely to shake Lettie's determination; and, though such a marriage would have suited her very well, she was getting very doubtful of its ever being brought about. Mrs. Kynaston had always a shrewd eye to the future. She liked wealthy friends, and Mr. and Mrs. Furzedon would have been always sure to have a pleasant house where she could claim a welcome. She had seen so many young women say "*No*" in the first instance to wealthy wooers, and afterwards change their minds, that she thought it might be so with Miss Devereux; but she thought so no longer, and considered that any such decided step on Mr. Furzedon's part—as volunteering himself to North Leach—might rend aside that flimsy fiction of his engagement, which it, for the present, suited Mrs. Kynaston to maintain.

She had told Mr. Furzedon that perseverance is all very well, but that it must be accompanied by tact. Given that, as long as a woman is unwed no man need despair of winning her for a wife ; and then Mrs. Kynaston, her platitudes got done with, relieved her own disappointment by administering as many pin-pricks to the rather pachydermatous Furzedon as she could compass.

In pursuance of her resolution Miss Devereux cantered over to The Firs, and found Kate Kynaston both at home and a prey to that unmitigated boredom which is apt to steal over sparsely-populated country neighbourhoods with the last days of the hunting season ; when the hot sun and bleak nor'easter have so dried up the ground that there is no scent ; when those on one side the cover are shivering while those on the other are mopping the perspiration from their brows, and a general feeling obtains that sylvan scenes and amusements are played out for the present. Mrs. Kynaston welcomed her visitor warmly. She was in that

state of *ennui* and depression that makes even the appearance of one's pet antipathy subject of rejoicing, so that she was most unfeignedly glad to see Lettie.

"How good of you to come!" she exclaimed. "I was just wondering what I should do with myself. The country has grown so *triste*, and I am positively pining for London."

"I don't think you have much cause for complaint," rejoined Miss Devereux, "not but what I quite agree with you that it is a dull time with us; still, two or three weeks will see you out of it."

"Yes; and I believe it's nothing but sheer perversity on Dick's part that makes us stay even that long. He insists upon staying for Lincoln Races; declares he's going to win a hunters' flat-race there. What a jolly party we were there two years ago."

"Yes," said Lettie; "poor Charlie, how mortified he was at being—as he said—

gammoned out of the race by the Walkers. It was a bitter pill for him having to leave the —th Hussars ; but I verily believe having to part with Polestar caused him as much grief as anything.”

“ Yes, I dare say. It’s sad to think of, my dear, but I fancy the laureate knew what he was writing about. It is rather humiliating—

‘Something nearer than his dog,
Not so dear, quite, as his horse.’

But the noble animal does come first, I’m afraid, with these hard riders. When Mrs. Morrison got such a nasty fall last year they say her husband’s first anxious inquiry was, ‘ Is the mare much hurt? ’ ”

“ I won’t have Charlie compared to a brute like Mr. Morrison,” said Lettie, laughing ; “ besides, that couple are very well matched. If he had come to grief I can quite fancy her making the like inquiry. Shall you go to Lincoln with the Major? ”

“No; it’s no fun by myself in that way. I wish you would come.”

“We’ve none of us any heart for it this year,” replied Lettie. “Mother is quite convinced that she will never see Charlie again, and he was her favourite, you know; and even father, I believe, is sorry now that he didn’t pay all that money, sooner than Charlie should have had to exchange.”

“The old story,” said Mrs. Kynaston, meditatively. “Fathers are so fond of playing the relentless parent to start with, forgetting they are usually unfitted for the *rôle*; besides, ‘the cutting off with a shilling’ is quite out of fashion now-a-days. Do you ever hear anything of Mr. Slade, or any of Charlie’s old friends?”

“I know nothing of Mr. Slade, and haven’t seen him for more than a year. Of Mr. Furzedon—who, I suppose, must be included in that list—I have seen a good deal too much, though not lately. I have come to detest that man.”

“Which is hard,” rejoined Mrs. Kynaston, “considering how he has striven to produce an opposite result. No,” she continued, as Miss Devereux made an impatient gesture of dissent, “I am going to advocate his cause no longer; but what you call his persecution many women would regard as a proof of the sincerity of his love. There’s much truth in the old adage, and faint heart never *did* win fair lady. I suppose there are women who from very weariness yield at last to man’s pertinacity.”

“Poor weak creatures! But I am made of sterner stuff. I don’t like Mr. Furzedon, and I never shall. And you may call it what you like, but his still pursuing me with his addresses I regard as persecution.”

“Well, it’s a persecution that most girls look upon with a lenient eye,” retorted Mrs. Kynaston, who, although declaring that she could no longer advocate Furzedon’s cause, and who in her heart was quite convinced that it was hopeless, still

never could resist giving him such support as came to her hand.

“Do you know,” said Lettie, “that there has rather a curious thing happened about Mr. Furzedon lately.”

“No,” replied her companion, “and, if anything of importance had happened to him, I fancy Dick would have heard of it.”

“I had a letter the other day from my aunt Mrs. Connop, which has mystified me a good deal. She says she had a few lines from Mr. Slade, who tells her that Mr. Furzedon has got involved in a very serious scrape; whether he has told her of what nature or not I don’t know, she at all events does not tell me, but as far as I can make out the gist of Mr. Slade’s letter it appears to be that the less we see of Mr. Furzedon the better.”

“You mean to say, Lettie,” said Mrs. Kynaston, eagerly, “that he has done something which would involve his acquaintance

dropping him, because Mr. Slade's letter means *that* or nothing."

"It is putting things rather strongly, perhaps, but that is pretty much what I make out of aunt Sarah's letter. Mr. Slade no doubt imagines that Mr. Furzedon is a constant visitor in Onslow Gardens."

"Instead of being merely anxious to be one," interrupted Mrs. Kynaston. "Well never mind, I'll not allude to all that, but you do surprise me. Mr. Furzedon is such a shrewd self-possessed person I should have thought him the last man likely to get into an awkward scrape. By the way, Mr. Slade might have vouchsafed me a hint as well as Mrs. Connop. Mr. Furzedon is always at our house when we're in town. He and Dick are partners in racing matters. It can't be anything of that sort surely," continued Mrs. Kynaston, thoughtfully.

"I know no more than I have told you," replied Lettie, "but I don't quite share your opinion of Mr. Furzedon; I'll quite admit

that he is too shrewd and sensible to get into what's called a scrape, but I can quite imagine him capable in pursuit of his own schemes of what the world would call something unpardonable," and Lettie thought bitterly of how Furzedon had proposed to purchase her hand by the payment of her brother's debts.

Mrs. Kynaston eyed her visitor keenly. The same thought had once or twice occurred to herself, she was much too shrewd a judge of human nature not to have detected long ago that Furzedon was a very unscrupulous man; she had dismissed the thought as soon as it occurred to her with the reflection that after all this was an acquaintance of her husband. She had been told to be civil to him, and knew that Dick Kynaston was quite competent to take care of himself; she felt very curious to know what this cloud was that was hanging over Furzedon; but it was quite evident that Lettie knew no more whatever Mrs. Connop might do. In

the meantime it was possible that the Major would be able to solve the mystery when she should ask him about it.

“I will ring for my horse now, if you will allow me,” said Miss Devereux, “and I will let you know whenever the Furzedon mystery clears up; for the present, good-bye! and remember, you have only two or three weeks’ dulness before you, while, as for poor me, I am planted here till it pleases aunt Sarah to send for me!” and with a shrug of her shoulders, indicative of much disgust, Lettie Devereux took her departure.

CHAPTER V.

MAJOR KYNASTON'S VISITOR.

WHEN Major Kynaston came home that evening, his wife at once informed him of what Miss Devereux had told her; but the Major was even more astonished than his wife, and professed himself perfectly unable to guess what serape Furzedon had possibly got into. He quite agreed with his wife that Furzedon was about the last man he should have expected to come to grief in any way.

“He is as sharp as a needle, Kate, has plenty of money, and knows how to take care of it. He don’t overrate his game at anything, and there is no man in London

better able to take care of himself on the racecourse or at the card-table; *he's* not likely to come to harm; and, though it's going rather far to say that a man of his age is proof against the fascination of your sex, I can only think Furzedon's a fish that would take a deal of catching."

"But think, Dick, is there no Turf transaction in which he was engaged this year, in which his conduct might be called—well, shady?"

"None that I know of," rejoined the Major. "He's no fool; but I don't think he would do anything—to put it broadly—that could be laid hold of."

"Stop, Dick! What was the biggest *coup* you and he made last year? The Derby, wasn't it?"

"Yes; but Furzedon won a good deal more money than I did over it. He laid against the favourite to an extent I didn't dare, and got rather nervous about it."

"Just so; and wasn't there some story

about the jockey who rode Belisarius being drugged?"

"Yes; there always are all sorts of '*canards*' about when a favourite is beaten for a big race. Drugged," continued Dick Kynaston; "well, as far as taking about a bottle of brandy before he got up, I suppose Bill Smith was. He had been on the drink ever since he won the 'Two Thousand,' and it was the knowledge of that led us to bet against him. Furzedon, who, as I said before, went deeper into it than I did, had a tout down at Epsom to watch him, just as you would watch a horse; and it was his reporting that Bill Smith was never sober induced him to lay so heavily against the horse."

"Then, you don't believe the story of this drugged glass that was handed him in the paddock?" remarked Mrs. Kynaston.

"Certainly not," rejoined the Major. "Don't think Bill Smith required anything of that sort; he rendered himself incapable

in a legitimate way. But there are plenty of other ways a man may come to grief, Kate."

"Quite so," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston; "and, I suppose, if it's true that Mr. Furzedon is in trouble, it is from a cause we should never dream of."

"If there really is anything in the rumour, you may depend on it we shall soon hear—rather a bore if it's a big scandal," continued Dick, "because we have been rather intimate with him of late; and I have been mixed up in a good many business matters with him."

"Yes; as you say, it would be a little awkward; it always is when one's intimates turn out disreputable or adventurers. However, we shall doubtless soon know all about it, if there is anything to know."

Dick Kynaston upon this occasion went to Lincoln unaccompanied by his wife, and returned in high spirits, his speculations having proved eminently successful. As

had been arranged, the races over, the Kynastons at once took their departure for London, and Miss Devereux was left in the seclusion of North Leach, to make the best of an eastern county spring time, and anxiously await her aunt's invitation to visit her in Onslow Gardens. "Surely," thought Lettie, "Mr. Slade will feel himself bound to call, after writing that line of warning to aunt Sarah ;" and then she wondered whether that warning had not been intended for her. It was very possible Gilbert had heard that she was engaged to Mr. Furzedon, and was desirous of giving her a hint of that gentleman's character before it was too late. From what she knew of Gilbert Slade, he was not at all the man to indulge in reckless gossip about his fellows. She felt sure that he would never have written to Mrs. Connop in this wise without very substantial ground to go on. And then Lettie, as she turned the subject once more in her mind, whispered to herself, "he surely must

care a little about me, or he would never have interfered ;” for, by this time, Miss Devereux had quite convinced herself that it was in her special behoof that Gilbert had written to her aunt. How she did wish that she could see that letter ! Not that she supposed there was any mention of her in it ; but she was very curious to see exactly what Mr. Slade had said. At present she could not be sure whether this guarded reticence was Mrs. Connop’s or his. She was destined to read that letter some little time later with mingled feelings of pleasure and annoyance. In the meantime the Kynastons had duly settled in May Fair for the season, and the Major also had received a letter which puzzled him pretty nearly as much as Gilbert Slade’s did Miss Devereux. Dick Kynaston’s note was from the uncle, and the fact of Norman Slade writing to him *at all* astonished the Major not a little. When they had met, racing, Kynaston had more than once endeavoured to improve the

slight acquaintance he had had with him ; but Norman was a very difficult man to know, unless you happened to suit his fancy —the last man upon whom it was possible to force an acquaintance ; and, as we know, he had conceived a dislike to the Major the very first time he met him. The note was very formal and very short ; it commenced, “ Dear sir,” and briefly inquired when it would suit Major Kynaston to see the writer on a matter of business. Dick, of course, replied naming a day upon which he would be at home, and then consulted his wife as to what business it was possible Norman Slade could want to see him about. Mrs. Kynaston read the letter attentively, and then exclaimed—“ I am right, Dick ; it’s some Turf scrape that Mr. Furzedon has got into. Mr. Norman Slade is a great racing-man, is he not ? ”

The Major nodded assent.

“ You are known to be Furzedon’s Turf partner, and you may depend upon it he

went a good deal further than you know of about that Derby. There's a storm brewing, Dick, and I am afraid some of the mud likely to be stirred up will come our way."

" Rather rough if it should, but the Derby business took place as I told you the other day, and I don't believe Norman Slade wants to see me about anything connected with racing. More likely some young fellow has got into a mess about bills, and he wants my advice about it—his nephew the hussar, I shouldn't wonder."

Mrs. Kynaston's heart gave a jump as she thought of Bertie Slade in trouble and coming to them for advice and assistance. That would afford many delightful opportunities of prosecuting the flirtation for the forwarding of which she had so patiently schemed, and enable her to complete the subjugation of that errant dragoon; for that, given sufficient opportunity, any man could resist her fascinations was an idea that never crossed Kate Kynaston's mind. She had a

wild caprice to instal Bertie Slade as chief cavalier-in-waiting, and had allowed her feelings to run riot as far as he was concerned. What had been caprice was now dangerously near a mad infatuation, and Mrs. Kynaston had neither love for her husband nor much principle to stand to her should the hour of need come. A day or two later and Norman Slade was duly ushered into Kynaston's *sanctum* and welcomed with great cordiality by the Major.

“Don’t know what brings you here, Slade, but I’m very glad to see you; and now you have found us, I hope, although it is your first, it will be by no means your last visit.”

“I have called, Major Kynaston,” rejoined Norman, with a slight inflection on the Major, “to acquaint you with a very unpleasant circumstance, which, as it indirectly concerns you, ought to be made known to you. Mr. Furzedon is your racing partner, I believe.”

“ He is,” replied the Major shortly.

“ Are you aware of what his business is ? ” asked Slade.

“ I never heard he had one,” replied Kynaston with unfeigned surprise.

“ And yet you are credited with knowing the ins and outs of London life pretty well.”

“ What has that got to do with it ? ” replied the Major testily.

“ Mr. Furzedon is a money-lender on an extensive scale,” said Norman with an amused smile. “ He does business under the name of Jordan and Co.”

“ What ! ” exclaimed the Major, “ do you mean to tell me that Ralph Furzedon is Jordan and Co. the swell pawnbrokers ? ”

“ Just so,” replied Slade.

“ Well,” said the Major, “ it takes a good deal to astonish Dick Kynaston, but he’s fairly gravelled this time,” and then, to Norman Slade’s astonishment, the Major burst into a peal of laughter.

What could the man mean ? for Slade

felt sure that Kynaston spoke the truth when he declared his ignorance of Furzedon's carrying on business as Jordan and Co. Norman had experience in his Turf life of many shady characters, but he would have considered the discovery that one of his intimate friends was a professional money-lender by no means a thing to laugh at. But Dick Kynaston was struck with the cool cynicism of Furzedon, as the man about town, recommending his spendthrift associates to apply for relief to Jordan and Co., *alias* Furzedon, and how that he the Major had been unconsciously made to serve that gentleman's interests. However, a revulsion speedily took place, and Kynaston grasped the fact that his astute young partner had been making a fool of him. No man arrived at this situation but feels angry with the originator of it, and it was with not a little *hautcur* the Major replied,

“ I have been unable, Mr. Slade, to help laughing at Furzedon's amazing impudence,

but you can't suppose he would have ever crossed my threshold as a friend, nor been received by my wife, if I had had the slightest knowledge of his occupation. On a racecourse, as you know, we mix with strange acquaintances."

"Yes," said Norman ; "but I think you will admit his acquaintance, even there, is highly detrimental. I am about to bring a very grave charge against Mr. Furzedon before the Jockey Club ; against him remember, not you, though, as his racing partner, it is right you should have early notice of it."

The Major was listening with the greatest attention.

"I shall charge Mr. Furzedon with hoccusing the jockey of Belisarius in the Derby just before the race."

"Absurd!" interrupted the Major. "Bill Smith required no hoccusing, he was drunk, as all the world knows — "

"I have nothing to do with whether he

required it," sneered Norman ; " if he did not there was the less cause for Mr. Furzedon to commit unnecessary crime. That he did I can and shall prove. I suspected it at the time, and learnt it as a fact last year at Doncaster."

" And why was the charge not brought forward then ?" said Kynaston.

" Simply because I was unable to collect the evidence before the racing season terminated, and there has been no quorum of the Jockey Club to bring the case before since.

" I know there was some rumour of this kind current last May, but I never heard Furzedon's name connected with it. I always regarded it as an idle *canard*. You know very well, if a favourite does not run up to his form in a big race, there's generally a whisper of foul play of some kind—usually quite unwarranted. I can only say, Mr. Slade, should you prove your case, my connection with Mr. Furzedon is of course terminated—indeed I think I might say that under any

circumstances ; in the mean time I can only thank you for giving me this notice of your intentions."

" It was only right you should have it," rejoined Norman, rising ; " you know the world, and especially the racing world, too well, not to know that some odium will probably apply to yourself, in consequence of your partner's nefarious proceedings what steps you will think best to take are, of course, no business of mine ; I have only to warn you that the case is very clear against Furzedon. Good morning, Major Kynaston ! " And with a somewhat stiff bow Norman Slade left the room.

" Pleasant this, by Jove ! " muttered the Major as the street-door closed behind his visitor. " Slade is just the man to work out this thing relentlessly, and, what's more, the Jockey Club will listen to him. That young scoundrel ! I have not the slightest doubt he's guilty. Slade would never have spoken so confidently as he did if he had

not got chapter and verse for it ; he is quite right, some of the mud of this transaction is sure to stick to my skirts ! Nobody will ever believe that I wasn't in the swim ; they will probably suggest that it was all my *planning*, only that I was too cunning to risk doing it myself ! Quite likely the world will take that view of it, and will probably say that Furzedon has to bear all the punishment of it, while the chief offender has gone scatheless. Think of that young vagabond turning out to be Jordan and Co. ! ”

The Major's very high tone about money-lenders may seem somewhat preposterous, considering that he was but a money-lender's jackal himself ; but he regarded all that as a strictly business transaction, and upon the rare occasions any of the fraternity were permitted to pass his door they got no further than into his own immediate den.

As he walked away Norman Slade came to the conclusion that Major Kynaston had

been guilty of no connivance with his partner in the matter of the Epsom robbery. It had evidently been done without his knowledge, and it was quite evident to Slade that he was in considerable ignorance of Mr. Furzedon's character and pursuits. "To think," he muttered with a smile, "that such a sly old fox as Kynaston thinks himself should have been bamboozled by such a young blackguard as Furzedon. However, one must get up pretty early to hold one's own with a pawnbroker's nephew, I suppose, and this one certainly seems exceptionally gifted."

CHAPTER VI.

SHERE ALI VANISHES.

HOBSON and Charlie Devereux rode back to camp at a hand gallop. Sharp and decisive were the former's orders to strike the tents and fall in as quickly as possible. In less than an hour the soldiers had abandoned the shade of the grateful tope of palms and were tramping across the sandy plain that separated them from the wooded country. The soldiers all knew that their officers had come upon the enemy, and stepped out with a will, in the hope that at last they were about to come up with their wily fleet-footed foe, and settle with him for the many long wearisome marches he

had caused them. Charlie Devereux, especially, is very sanguine on this score, but the tough veteran who leads them is by no means hopeful about it.

“I trust you may prove right, Devereux,” said Hobson, in reply to the gleeful prognostications of his subaltern; “but they are cunning as jackals, these Pandies. They know where we halted, and Shere Ali would make a very good guess at how long we should be before we reached him, and I do not believe he will wait for us.”

Hobson proved a true prophet, for when they arrived at the edge of the jungle the skirmishers speedily announced that the enemy’s camp was deserted. His cooking fires were still smouldering, and it was evident, from other signs, that he had been encamped there for some days, but Shere Ali had now vanished, and there was nothing to show in what direction. It might have been by the road, but Hobson was well aware that there were numerous trails

through the jungle perfectly well known and not infrequently used by the natives, and it was more probable that the famous dacoit chief would sooner trust to the trackless forest to baffle the pursuit of the Feringhee than rely upon the legs of his followers on the main road. This was rather a tangled knot to unravel, and Charlie chafed and fretted a good deal, because his captain halted instead of pushing along the main road rapidly in pursuit of the fugitives.

“Surely we are losing time,” he remarked at length, no longer able to control his impatience.

“Don’t cackle about what you don’t understand, young ‘un,” rejoined Hobson, good-humouredly. “If I knew Shere Ali had gone that road ; if I really had some grounds for supposing he had taken it, I would push on at once. As it is, I am not going to march my men off their legs in pursuit of a Will-o’-the-Wisp. You, no doubt, think Englishmen can beat these Pandies at any-

thing. When it comes to running away, I tell you they're not in it with these fellows."

Charlie thought there was a lamentable want of dash about his leader; but Hobson had not hunted down the broken sepoy army in the great Mutiny time without learning how very hard they were to come up with when they did not deem it expedient to fight, and how they were served by their intimate knowledge of the bye-ways of the country.

"It's weary work," continued Hobson, "but there is nothing for it but to make such inquiries as one can, and if we can make out nothing about Shere Ali and his band patrol the main road."

"Like policemen on their beats," said Charlie, with a face of extreme disgust.

"Just so," rejoined Hobson. "However, you needn't be down on your luck. I don't know why, but I have an idea that you are destined to be face to face with Shere Ali one of these days."

“What makes you think that?” asked Charlie.

“I tell you I don’t know. Psha! that’s not quite true. I’m not much given to dreaming, but I had a confused dream the other night, in which you and a tall Pandie figured prominently.”

“And what were we doing?”

“Well, your best to kill each other,” replied Hobson.

“And how did it finish?”

“That is just what I can’t tell you. It was most annoying. I awoke in the middle of it, and I was most anxious to see the finish of that fight.”

“But who was getting the best of it?” said Charlie, with great interest.

“It was anybody’s battle,” replied Hobson, laughing. “Don’t think me blood-thirsty, but I did want to see it fought out.”

“Well,” returned Charlie, “I need scarcely say I should have preferred your being able to say it was six to four on me when you left.

Sorry, too, he is so big. Have you ever seen him?"

"No; but I've seen lots of his sort. They run tall, these Bengalee sepoys. I had our old bugbear Shere Ali and you in my head, which, with that remarkably tough mutton we dined on yesterday, would quite account for my vision."

"And where were you?" asked Charlie.

"Oh, you seldom see yourself. Don't you recollect that when you do, according to Scott's *Legend*, you sleep in a 'bluidy plaid' ere long? But, holloa! what's this? It looks like a runner from head-quarters." And as Hobson spoke a peon was seen coming along the road at the sling trot with which the native usually accomplishes the task of letter-bearing.

When he reached Hobson he stopped, made a low salaam, and handed him a letter. The Captain tore it open, and, as he glanced hastily over it, exclaimed, "My dream is about to come true. Hurrah! No more of

this tiresome game of 'catch who catch can.' We are re-called, and are to be mounted. The chief says the fiat has gone forth that Shere Ali is to be suppressed at any price. It seems he has been throat-cutting on a somewhat extensive scale of late, and the Government are determined to take him dead or alive."

"Only give us horses, and we will soon account for him," cried Charlie, who, as an ex-dragoon, believed implicitly in mounted men, and held that a regiment of hussars could go anywhere and do anything. "But it will take a long while to make them."

"Put your cavalry ideas on one side, young 'un. Remember we are only mounted infantry, and our horses are hacks, not chargers."

Charlie made no reply. He comprehended but one idea of a soldier on horseback, and that was evidently not Hobson's. Still, if they only did get at Shere Ali, it wouldn't, he thought, much matter how. Charlie

was burning for that fight of which Hobson had dreamt. “When shall we march?” he said at length.

“A little before daybreak to-morrow; and we will get back to head-quarters as quickly as possible.”

On their arrival at the cantonment, Charlie and Hobson found their work cut out for them, and for the next month were busily engaged in organising the mounted infantry. The regiment was picked for men who could ride; and they found no lack of volunteers, the only difficulty laid in the selection, for the British soldier, in his anxiety to vary the monotony of his life, in some cases over-estimated his equestrian capabilities. The authorities were urgent for the departure of Hobson’s command as soon as possible; and there was therefore no time to teach those to ride who had not some knowledge of it. Shere Ali was increasing in audacity week by week, and seemed ubiquitous in the Deccan. He had

of late taken to ensure there being no evidence against him by the wholesale murder of those he had robbed, after the manner of the Thugs ; and there was, consequently, no actual proof of his being the author of some of the atrocities laid to his charge. He was said to be at the head of a numerous band of desperadoes, and to boast openly that he would not be taken alive, and neither asked nor gave quarter. The question of Shere Ali had become that of the apprehension of a great marauder ; the laying hold of a Rob Roy or Schinderhannes, and the interest increased in intensity with the constantly-recurring stories of the dacoit's audacity and ferocity.

But a Nemesis attends these human tigers, and they mostly die violent deaths. The buccaneer chiefs, who made their victims walk the plank, chiefly " found a rope on it " before their course was run. Sooner or later some one revolts at the doings of these blood-stained monsters, and either

betrays them to the powers that be or rids the world of them ; and it is the conviction that this awaits them, and can only be averted by the terror they inspire, that makes them, once launched on their career, insatiable in their lust of blood. Shere Ali knew that his life was forfeit, and said grimly that when his time came his spirit would depart well attended.

Hobson's men at last satisfy the Colonel's critical eye ; and, with young Devereux as his subaltern, the Captain is once more dispatched in pursuit of his wily foe. There has grown up in the breasts of Hobson, and such of his men as were with him on his former expedition, a feverish thirst to settle accounts with Shere Ali, such as a keen shikarri might feel to come face to face with a “man-eater,” such as some years previously pervaded the Central Indian Field Force on the subject of Tantia Topee. That sagacious chieftain was always dodging backwards and forwards across the Ner-

budda, in a perfectly maddening manner, determined to fight only on his own terms, which, as a good strategist, meant when the chances were much in his favour. Again and again did one or other of the English leaders think themselves certain of his capture, only after two or three forced marches to find the wily Asiatic had once more slipped across the river. Shere Ali was enacting the great drama over again on a small scale, but with no abatement of the murder and outrage that characterised the great rebellion.

“There, Hobson,” said the Colonel, as he bade the detachment farewell, “I hope you will have the luck to capture the scoundrel; there are so many parties out on the same errand that it is impossible he can evade you all. Depend upon it Shere Ali’s career is about run.”

“My fellows are keen enough, sir. He’s cost us too many long tramps not to make

us eager to bring him to book, and this time he won't beat us for speed."

But Shere Ali proved more irritating to his enemies than ever upon this occasion. Detachments of cavalry and mounted infantry were, as they thought, closing in upon him on all sides, when suddenly the famous dacoit vanished; no intelligence of his whereabouts possible to be arrived at. Where he had gone or what had become of him nobody knew. Vague rumours there were that he had broken up his band and fled into Bengal. Weeks went by, and, all efforts to learn anything concerning him proving useless, his pursuers were reluctantly recalled, but not before the leaders of the various parties had confessed to being unable to discover any trace of him.

" Fairly beat, sir," said Hobson, when he reported himself to his chief on his return. " I learnt for certain that I was within forty miles of Shere Ali. Did it in seven hours, only to find him fled—where to it is impos-

sible to conjecture. If the earth had swallowed him and his followers they could not have more utterly vanished."

"We shall hear of that fellow again before long," said the Colonel grimly, "and I hope hang him before we've done with him."

The chief proved a true prophet; ere a month had elapsed an outrage was perpetrated between Jubbulpore and Nagpore, which eclipsed all previous exploits of the kind. A treasure-chest under escort of an English officer and twenty sepoys was lured into an ambuscade and slaughtered to a man. Except during the great Mutiny, it was rarely that the native had dared to raise his hand against the life of the white man, and it was regarded as a striking instance of Shere Ali's audacity that he should have ventured to slay a Feringhee. For that he was the author of this crime none doubted, although none of the luckless escort lived to tell the tale of their disaster. Even in

the worst days of Thuggee, the votaries of Bhowanee had never ventured to cast the dastardly roomel around the throat of the white man. Nor had the dacoits previously ever ventured to attack the dominant race. It had been the proud boast before the terrible outbreak of Fifty-Seven, that an English lady could travel all through the Indian Peninsula with no further escort than her native servants in perfect safety. No wonder that a cry for vengeance went forth against this wholesale murderer, and the press, both English and native, were unanimous in demanding the life of Shere Ali. For once the blood-thirsty dacoit had committed not only an atrocious crime but a grave blunder. The massacred sepoys were recruited from the Presidency, and had friends and relatives scattered far and wide through the country which Shere Ali had chosen for the scene of his operations—none quicker to see this than the Colonel of the Rifles.

“The beggar has overreached himself this time, Hobson. Some of the dead men’s relatives are sure to betray him sooner or later. As for there being no witness to his last crime, that doesn’t matter—we’ve enough against Shere Ali to hang him three times over.” And so the fiat went forth that Shere Ali was to be hunted down, and once more patrols of mounted infantry and cavalry were despatched to scour the country.

“Remember,” thundered the fiery old Commander-in-Chief at Madras, “I will have that man dead or alive, and you will march to-and-fro through the land like so many wandering Jews till you get him.”

“Gad, Charlie,” said Hobson, when that speech reached his ears, “it is devoutly to be hoped that some of us will lay hold of him before long, for Sir Timothy is a man of his word, and that means dacoit-hunting for life.” So once more the roads were scoured in all directions, villages searched, and heavy rewards offered for any intelli-

gence that might lead to the arrest of Shere Ali, but again that mysterious personage had disappeared. One thing only was to be ascertained concerning him, namely, that he had dismissed the main body of his followers for the present, and retired with only a few of the most trusted to his stronghold; but where that stronghold was no man apparently could tell; it was rumoured that the secret of its whereabouts was jealously guarded and utterly unknown to the bulk of his band, only a few well-tried retainers being aware of its locality—ruffians for the most part as deeply blood-stained as himself.

But the patrolling and vigilant search for Shere Ali ceased nowhere upon that account. “Sooner or later his necessities will compel the tiger to leave his lair,” argued the Commander-in-Chief of the Presidency, “and then will come the hunter’s opportunity.”

CHAPTER VII.

AN ENEMY HATH DONE THIS THING.

DICK KYNASTON was not the man to await the tide of events upon finding himself involved in an awkward scandal. Innocent though he was, he saw at once that it would be difficult to make the world believe that he had no knowledge of his partner's practices. One thing however was quite clear to him, that there was no time to be lost in publicly repudiating all partnership with Furzedon in racing matters. No one would believe that he was not implicated in the affair unless he broke off all relations with Furzedon. Indeed, as the Major pondered over Norman Slade's story, the more indig-

nant he became that he should have been such a mere puppet in the hands of his clever young friend. What, he, the knowing Dick Kynaston, the shrewd man about town, who knew the ropes, who was up to every move on the board—he to be hoodwinked by this young pawnbroker, and find himself mixed up in one of the most shameful Turf robberies he had ever heard of! He would ask Mr. Furzedon to call upon him for the last time, give him a piece of his mind, and tell him that in future they would be strangers to each other.

The Major gradually churned himself up to a very pretty state of indignation. Although by no means particular, he was honestly angry that he should have unwittingly become involved in such an ugly scrape as this promised to become. He was quite aware that his own racing career had not been of that blameless chivalric nature at which no stone can be thrown. He was reputed a sharp practitioner, and the world

cannot pretend to decide where such gentlemen draw the line. Straight-going humdrum folks fail to see much difference between what is termed “picking people up,” by which is meant taking advantage of them, and picking pockets, and the Major, although his code of morality was otherwise, recognised this feeling. But, perhaps, what moved his wrath more than anything was the blow to his self-love, the idea that he should have been so completely overreached by a young gentleman whom he certainly deemed astute, but no sort of match for knowing Dick Kynaston, and yet he had been bamboozled into playing jackal to this young money-lender. He could not help showing his indignation in his letter, although when he sat down to pen his note to Furzedon, asking him to call the next morning, as he wanted to see him on a matter of business, nothing was further from his intention.

These *temperate* epistles we pen in our

hot wrath are not read quite in the same light by their recipients, and if we only kept them till the next morning we should usually modify them considerably. I recollect submitting a studiously worded missive of this description to a friend, and exclaiming triumphantly with reference to the offender "he can't say anything about that." My friend's eye twinkled as he replied, "Only that there's a good deal of east wind in it."

Now this was exactly what struck Furzedon when he read the Major's note. Dick Kynaston was wont to write in an off-hand jovial fashion, but this time Ralph saw at a glance that the language was iced. "I wonder what the deuce is up," he muttered, "there is a screw loose somewhere, and Kynaston evidently thinks I am to blame for it. I don't want to break with the Kynastons, more especially with the lady. She has been of some service to me already in a social way. She has given me several

useful introductions, to say nothing of hints. She understands the game of society so thoroughly, I would sooner trust to her advice than that of any one in England. She first made me understand that to a man with money, tact, and a pretty wife, all society is attainable. What can have gone wrong, for that the Major thinks I've 'upset the coach' is evident in every line of his letter?" Ralph Furzedon made his way to the Major's house next day, and was promptly shown into Kynaston's sanctum. He was a little surprised at the Major's curt good morning, and saw at a glance that gentleman was seriously disturbed, and meant coming to the point with scant preamble; so, like the astute young man he was, Furzedon asked no questions, but left his companion to open the ball.

"I have sent for you, Mr. Furzedon," commenced Kynaston, with considerable *hauteur*—

"Sent for me, Major Kynaston? What

the devil do you mean?" interposed Ralph sharply.

"If you will be good enough not to interrupt me you will know in five minutes," was the equally sharp rejoinder. "In the first place I am credibly informed that, instead of being an idle man-about-town living on your own means, you are in reality a money-lender."

"Even if that were so, which I don't admit, I should fancy there was nothing in the position to shock Major Kynaston," replied Furzedon sarcastically.

"I am not in the least shocked. I know half the money-lenders in London, but I don't *associate* with them. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly; though I do not see how your remark applies to me."

"Don't you?" returned Kynaston. "Then I will put it a little plainer to you. I no longer intend to be on visiting terms with Mr. Furzedon, *alias* Jordan and Co."

Furzedon winced, but his hardihood did not as yet fail him. “And who dares to say that I am Jordan and Co.?”

“One who seems to have a good deal more than that to allege against you—Norman Slade.”

“Norman Slade!” ejaculated Furzedon, as the scene in the Paddock at Epsom shot athwart his brain. “What the deuce does Norman Slade know about me?”

“He knows who you are, and what you are,” replied Kynaston sternly. “He knows that you hoecussed Bill Smith at Epsom, and means that all the world shall know it too.”

“If he dares to bring such a charge against me,” blustered Furzedon, starting to his feet, “I’ll prosecute him for libel.”

“Then you’ll precious soon have the opportunity. He intends to bring your case before the Jockey Club at once, and has vowed not to rest till you’re warned off the Heath.”

“ Let him. Giving a jockey a glass of wine is not houcussing him. A fig for Norman Slade and his threats; he will find that charge rather difficult to substantiate.”

“ He says not,” rejoined Kynaston, “ and he is not the man to say so unless he has full proof of it. I have given you due warning of what is in store for you—henceforth remember we are strangers to each other.”

“ As you like,” sneered Furzedon; “ but you seem to forget that you made as good a thing out of Bill Smith’s drunkenness as I did.”

“ I bet against a jockey who is unfit to ride as I do against a horse who is unfit to run, but I don’t take part in bringing about that state of things !”

“ And you mean to say that *I* do !” exclaimed Furzedon angrily.

“ I say nothing about it, one way or another, and have nothing further to add than—good morning :” and as he spoke

Kynaston rang the bell and made his visitor a formal bow of dismissal.

For an instant the blood surged in Furzedon's temples, and he felt a fierce inclination to spring upon Kynaston ; but, mastering his passion by a violent effort, he turned on his heel, and abruptly left the room without recognising his host's salutation.

When Furzedon reached the street, he began to think seriously over this disaster that had befallen him. He had blustered and denied everything to Dick Kynaston ; but, for all that, the charges were true, and he could see that the Major believed them to be so. The mere fact of being proclaimed a money-lender would, he knew, damn him socially ; nor was he at all certain that Norman Slade would fail in proving the charge he intended to bring against him,—he had employed men to lead the great jockey to his destruction. Ralph Furzedon had seen a good deal of the dirty side of life ; it was not the first time he had used men as tools

to effect his purposes : and he knew what such confederates were worth. Paid to do the work with which their employer fears to soil his own fingers, they are prompt to sell him afterwards to any one who will buy their information. Ah ! why had his nerve failed him at the last moment ? These men had done their work well and sufficiently, but he was afraid, he stood so much money against Belisarius that his heart failed him ; he determined to make assurance doubly sure. Just those few drops in the last glass would effectually madden the man's already heated brain, and destroy all judgment ; but it put him—Furzedon—terribly in the hands of his myrmidons, who, dexterously as it was done, could not fail to see it. How had this all come against him at once ? It was so many months back, that he had thought all danger of discovery was over. Then, again, how did Norman Slade learn that he traded in money under the name of Jordan & Co. ? that was a secret he had jealously

guarded. He had thought that known only to the confidential clerk who acted as his representative ; and, as far as he could feel certain about any one, he was of that man's fidelity and discretion.

Where had Slade acquired this information ? Those myrmidons of his might have been bribed to betray the story of the great Epsom race ; but of his money-dealing they had no knowledge. How had that closely-kept secret come to light ? And, for the present, Ralph Furzedon was utterly at a loss to even suspect who it was that had divulged the mystery of his occupation. But he was at no loss to recognise the danger of his position, and his brain was already busily scheming as to how it was best, how it was possible, to meet these unpleasant revelations. He ran no risk of being entrapped by the meshes of the law, but his social ostracism was imminent. As a pawn-broker, and the perpetrator of an infamous Turf robbery, that world he so coveted to

mix with would have none of him, and this to Furzedon meant the loss of all he deemed life worth living for—the end of his ambition; to figure in that world, and at the same time to in some wise pull the strings of it, to know of the skeletons in the cupboard and look cynically on at the raree show—and what men know more of these last than usurers and solicitors?—all that would have delighted Furzedon. Well, there was no necessity for it as yet, for he supposed the best way out of the embroglie would be to go abroad for a time; stories of this sort speedily blew over; and, unless the affair was kept constantly before it, in a week or two the world would cease to talk about it. Norman Slade, too, would be checkmated about that Epsom business; it would be little use bringing such a charge against a man who had crossed the Channel; and Furzedon felt that he should get out of the serape cheaply at the expense of a few months' absence from London. Better for

him that the charge should be dropped than brought, even if not substantiated.

One thing, however, puzzled Furzedon much ; he could not conceive how it was that his identity with Jordan and Co. had leaked out ; there was no one whom he could suspect, for, strange to say, that Prance might have betrayed him never entered his head. His relations with that worthy had been so long dropped, and he so rarely encountered him, that he had forgotten that Prance knew all the history of his past life ; but he swore a great oath of vengeance against the man who had proclaimed the fact that he was a pawnbroker and a usurer, should he ever discover it. And, though in his first surprise at finding Norman Slade so accurately informed as to his antecedents, Prance had not occurred to him as the informant ; still, sooner or later, it was pretty certain to flash across him, and then it was likely that vow would be kept with ruthless exactitude.

He had regained his chambers, and was still pondering over all these things, when his servant brought in a pencilled note, which he handed to him with the intimation that the gentleman was waiting. Furzedon glanced hastily at the note, and muttered to himself, “Sturgeon! now what on earth can bring him here?” He might well ask, for Mr. Jacob Sturgeon was the confidential and personal representative of Jordan and Co., and his visiting Furzedon’s rooms was strictly interdicted. As the latter knew, it must be something of considerable importance that led him to disregard his instructions on that point.

“Show him up,” said Furzedon; and in another minute Mr. Sturgeon entered the room—a plump, quietly-dressed, prosperous-looking man of business.

“I am sorry to intrude, sir; but, as you can easily guess, it is a matter of importance that has made me disobey orders; a circumstance I thought you should be

made acquainted with without loss of time."

"Yes, yes!" said Furzedon, impatiently.
"Get on; what is it?"

"Well, sir," replied Mr. Sturgeon, "we've had rather an awkward scene up at the office. A Major Braddock called in about those bills of young Devereux's. He pointed out that Mr. Devereux was in India, and therefore, for the present, quite out of our reach; but that his friends were anxious to come to terms with us, and that he was empowered to agree to any reasonable composition."

"Ha!" exclaimed Furzedon; "I thought they would be glad to come to terms before long. And you, what did you say?"

"Oh! sir," replied Sturgeon, smiling, "I told them the old story—that for money lent upon next to no security, as Mr. Devereux's was, we claimed, and expected to get, heavy interest; that there were also legal expenses; that I would submit what he said

to my principals ; but that I could hold forth no hope of their foregoing their claims ; that we could afford to wait ; that, though Mr. Devereux had been unfortunate, we knew him to be a gentleman, and felt perfect confidence in his eventually meeting his liabilities.”

“ Quite right,” replied Furzedon ; “ and what did Major Braddock say to that ? ”

“ Well, he astonished me not a little, sir. As a matter of course, I looked upon it as only delicate fencing for the best terms on either side ; but Major Braddock suddenly interrupted me with ‘ stop all the clap-trap of your class ; we happen to know who your principal is ; we know who it is that trades in usury under the name of Jordan and Co. ; we know all about the pawnbroker’s shop in the next street, and are quite prepared to go into court if you don’t make fair terms with us.’ I rejoined that, if compelled to it, I didn’t suppose that my principals would object to that way of coming by their own.”

“Ah! and what did he say to that?” inquired Furzedon, eagerly.

“Major Braddock,” replied Sturgeon, “took me up sharp. ‘You mistake,’ he said, ‘your principal—for you have only one—would be very unwilling to go into the witness-box; he is a good young man, and loth that his left should know what his right hand is doing. No, no! Ralph Furzedon won’t wish to figure before his friends and acquaintances in his real character. No; the sooner you let him know that we are aware of who we are dealing with the better.’”

“And that was all that passed between you?” asked Furzedon.

“Pretty well, sir,” rejoined Sturgeon; “I told him politely he was mistaken; but he only rejoined, more briefly than civilly, ‘Not much’; threw his card on the table, and left the place.”

“Quite right to come and tell me,” said Furzedon; “you have, of course, no idea how he came by his knowledge?”

“No, sir ; I could have sworn that nobody either at the shop or the offices had any idea who Jordan and Co. were, except myself, and the secret has never passed my lips.”

“Thank you ; that will do,” replied Furzedon. “If Major Braddock calls again, stick to it that he is mistaken. Don’t come here again unless you think it absolutely necessary ;” and, with a careless nod, Furzedon intimated to Mr. Sturgeon that his interview was at an end.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING.

“HALLOA, Bertie! where have you been all the morning; under what pretence have you been evading your military duties? Allow me to congratulate you,” exclaimed young Sparshot.

“I’ve been on a board on forage; but I don’t see that that’s a particular subject for congratulation,” returned Slade, as he took a chair in the mess-room, and prepared to assuage the hunger that his morning’s work had created.

“Then you’ve heard nothing about Tom Henderson’s letter, although it specially concerns you?”

“Not a word,” replied Bertie; “what has Tom got to say?”

“First of all,” rejoined young Sparshot, “Tom has met his Fate; and, as his Fate happens to be possessed of more dollars than a hussar ever dreamt of, he is going to sell out, and that gives you your troop, *Captain Slade*.”

“We shall all be sorry to lose Henderson,” said Bertie; “but promotion is promotion, and in this case we have only to congratulate him on his retirement; but what is this other news?”

“Well, for some inscrutable reason, it seems the authorities have decided to send us out to India at once, instead of in the autumn.”

“You don’t mean that!” exclaimed Slade; “unless they’ve good grounds, it is rather rough upon us all; it’s always a bad business having to dispose of horses in a hurry.”

“Yes,” rejoined Sparshot; “the end of

the hunting season ; and all the officers of Her Majesty's —th Hussars are likely, I am afraid, to have a bad sale."

Bertie Slade was not a little taken aback by the news of the sudden order for India. He knew very well what this meant. That for the few weeks left to them there would be plenty of work to be done ; that every officers's hands would be full, and leave of absence difficult to obtain ; and yet he felt that it was absolutely necessary for him to pay a short visit to London. He had written, as we know, to Mrs. Connop ; and in his letter had vaguely told her that a very serious charge was likely to be advanced against Ralph Furzedon, and delicately hinted that she would do well to suspend further intimacy with him until she heard the result. He did not like to speak more plainly ; but his meaning was that Miss Devereux, to whom he firmly believed Furzedon to be engaged, should pause before uniting herself to a man whom a few weeks might see

socially blasted. He had not liked to particularise the offence of which Furzedon had been guilty, and to attempt interference in the slightest degree with Miss Devereux's matrimonial intentions was, he felt, quite out of his province; and yet, knowing, as he did from his uncle Norman, the story of Furzedon's life, he felt it was impossible that he could look on and see the girl he passionately loved married to such a scoundrel. Lettie Devereux need never fear about him; he might be destined never to win her for his wife, but for all that, surely he ought not to let her contract this marriage in ignorance; surely no money could compensate for the utter loss of position which awaited Ralph Furzedon. He had not intended to speak more plainly. A very little, and the accusation would be publicly proclaimed in the press; but, now he was going to India, it might not be brought forward till after his departure. There was delay sometimes about these

things ; and it was possible that the knowledge might come to Miss Devereux too late.

Bertie's serious face was the cause of not a little chaff from his gay companions, as young Sparshot said Slade was the only man who apparently appreciated the gravity of the situation. "He'll chill the very marrow in our bones directly. I can see he is just about to begin, with mocking laughter,

Ah! know ye the land of the sepoy and tiger,
And the terrible pranks that they play in that clime."

Bertie laughed as he rose. "One would have thought, Spar," he said, "that the 'terrible pranks' were thrashed out of the sepoy during the Mutiny times ; but, according to Charlie Devereux, there are some of them still untamed. No, I've got a few things I want to settle before I start, and I'm rather bothered about how to do it." And so saying Bertie left the room.

"Yes," he thought, when he reached his own quarters, "there is no help for it ; I

must run up to town, see Mrs. Connop, and tell her the whole story ; if she thinks fit to let her niece marry a man with such a charge hanging over him, I can do no more. It is impossible for me to speak to Lettie herself ; though how, in spite of his money, she could accept such a cad as Furzedon ! ” And here Bertie Slade wound up his train of thought by discharging a volley of maledictions against that gentleman.

Bertie Slade easily obtained the short leave he ventured to ask for. He had a good many things to do in town besides his interview with Mrs. Connop. He was anxious to see his uncle Norman, to ascertain when this business of Furzedon’s would be brought forward. Major Braddock he also wanted to talk with, partly on his own account and partly concerning Charlie Devereux. Major Braddock, however, he felt certain of seeing before he sailed. The Major retained the greatest possible interest

in his old regiment, and was little likely to let them sail for the East without coming down to Portsmouth to witness their embarkation. The settlement of Charlie's debts had been left to the discretion of Bob Braddock; and Bertie was in ignorance of what steps the Major had lately taken about their settlement. The last time he had heard from his uncle Bob that gentleman had assured him there was no hurry, that the less they troubled about it the more likely an advantageous offer was to come from the other side. But the Major was now acquainted with the identity of Jordan and Co., and Bertie thought that would probably change his tactics.

However, the day after his arrival in town, at the earliest canonical hour permissible for calling, Gilbert Slade made his way into Onslow Gardens. "Mrs. Connop was at home," he was told, in answer to his inquiry. And without more ado he was

ushered up into the drawing-room, where, to his great astonishment, he found himself face to face with Lettie Devereux. The situation was awkward. What he had to say he could neither say to Miss Devereux nor before her. And yet that say it he would he was doggedly determined. Lettie rose to receive him; and, though taken by surprise as well as himself, yet she masked her feelings well. Her heart beat quickly, but her chance had come; and come what might it should go hard if before he left she had not disabused Mr. Slade's mind of any idea that she was engaged to Mr. Furzedon. Mrs. Connop had not destroyed Bertie's note, and Miss Devereux had had little difficulty in persuading her aunt to allow her to see it. She read between the lines easily enough, and laughed as she said, "I think, auntie dear, this letter was meant more for me than for you, and has been written, I have no doubt, under a very mistaken idea." And Mrs. Connop was far too shrewd a

woman not to think her niece was taking a correct view of the subject.

“ Charmed to see you, Mr. Slade,” said Lettie, as she rose to receive her visitor. “ Since poor Charlie’s ‘ grief ’ we have never set eyes upon you. My aunt will be down in a few minutes”—Miss Devereux devoutly hoped she would not—“ and I am sure is dying, as we all are, to thank you for your kindness to him in his trouble.”

“ Pray don’t mention it,” rejoined Bertie, “ it’s one of the canons of the service that we must stick to each other ; we all did the best we could for Charlie, but you know there was nothing for it but India.”

“ I know,” replied Lettie, “ but I am afraid he finds the life out there very dull.”

“ Not a bit of it, Miss Devereux,” rejoined Slade. “ Charlie is engaged in quite a lively pursuit out there ; he and half the soldiers in the Madras Presidency apparently are engaged in hunting down the craftiest and most murderous old robber that ever

took to the roads. This Sherc Ali keeps them tramping continually up and down the Presidency, and seems as difficult to lay hands upon as a Will-o'-the-Wisp. We shall perhaps get there in time to get a turn at him too."

" You, Mr. Slade ! Why what do you mean ? "

" Ah ! I forgot I hadn't told you we've got our orders for India ; and, as luck has it, are going to the same Presidency that Charlie is in. We are off in about three or four weeks."

Then the conversation rather languished. These were two young people very desirous of saying something to each other, and neither of them knowing exactly how to begin. Of course, it was all remarkably simple. Bertie Slade wished to impress upon Miss Devereux that she really ought not to marry Furzedon ; while the lady on her side was equally anxious to impress upon him that she had not the slightest intention of doing

so. It is all very well to smile as a bystander, and say "Absurd! These people could not fail to come to an explanation at once." But have you no experience of these comparatively easy explanations *not* come to? Have you never thought, as you gained the street, of the thing you wished you had said in the drawing-room? And do not all of us know that the explanation so easy at first becomes more difficult day by day? Now, Lettie Devereux had good grounds for thinking that Bertie Slade was rather smitten with herself, and this seemed to make it rather difficult for her to volunteer the information that she was not engaged to Mr. Furzedon. If Bertie would only afford her the slightest opening it would be so easy; but then, Bertie, on his side, felt that he could not congratulate her. And that was the only way he could see of alluding to what he supposed to be a settled thing.

"You will probably see Charlie, then?" said Miss Devereux, at length, with that

usual disregard of the size of the country apt to characterise people who have never been there.

“Probably,” replied Bertie, “though it may be some time first; and I have come to say ‘good-bye,’ Miss Devereux; and I have one favour to ask you before I go. I wrote a note a short time ago to Mrs. Connop. I don’t know whether she showed it to you, but, at all events, I hope she will.”

“I have seen it,” interrupted Lettie. “Still, what have I to do with it?”

“I only want you to believe that I am quite certain of what I say in it, and that I am not merely detailing idle gossip.”

“As I said before, I really don’t see anything in it that concerns me.”

Gilbert Slade was troubled. It was evident that he could depend upon no help from Miss Devereux. It was possible that she might indignantly refuse to listen to any imputation on her lover. But Bertie was resolute to speak out.

"I should have thought," he remarked, "that you could not be indifferent to hearing that any one you had lived upon friendly terms with ran the risk of being brought to shame. I have no wish to discuss it, but I thought that as he had stayed at North Leach, and was intimate with you all, you ought to know it."

"Why ought I to know it?" exclaimed Miss Devereux, indignantly. "Why will you keep insisting that this specially concerns me? If Mr. Furzedon has done anything disgraceful, surely my father or my brothers are the people you ought to communicate with."

It is very rarely that loss of temper conduces to promote a good understanding between people who are at cross purposes. But Miss Devereux's natural exasperation somewhat cleared the air, and dispersed the fog in which they were both rapidly losing themselves. Bertie, like herself, was now not a little nettled, and it was somewhat

sharply that he retorted “I can only say that, according to rumour, anything affecting Mr. Furzedon is likely to be more severely felt by Miss Devereux than by any other of her family. I suppose I was wrong to touch upon the subject, but Charlie and I were staunch friends.”

“I know that,” rejoined Lettie, gently. “And you are only saying to me what you would have said to him, had he been in England. But you’re under a mis-apprehension, Mr. Slade. You have heard an absurd and rather annoying rumour that got about last season, and for which, believe me, there never has been the slightest foundation.”

“Do you mean to say,” said Bertie eagerly, “that there is no engagement between you and Mr. Furzedon?”

“Certainly not, I hardly understand myself how the rumour got about.”

“As far as I am concerned, I had it from your own brother.”

“ What from Charlie? when ?”

“ Last spring, and that is why I have regarded it as a fact. When a young lady’s brother tells you the thing is so you must admit you have it from good authority.

“ Yes, indeed,” replied Miss Devereux; “ but who on earth could have put that into Charlie’s head? I am perfectly sure it never occurred to himself;” but here their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Connop, who was unfeignedly glad to see her old favourite again, and gave Gilbert Slade a most cordial welcome.

“ How long are you up in town for?” she asked, as she settled herself in her chair.

“ Mr. Slade has come to say good-bye, auntie,” interposed Miss Devereux.

“ Goodbye, child! why he has hardly said how d’ye do, and we haven’t seen him for months. I’ve got lots to say to you, Mr. Slade. I am dying for a long gossip with

you. What day will it suit you to come out and dine with us?"

"I am very sorry, but I hardly think that is possible. I have only to-night and to-morrow night in town, and shall be so busy all day that dinner will have to be a very movable feast with me. There is of course a great deal to do, and we really are off at once, and at very short notice."

Then the conversation became general, and Mrs. Connop was deeply interested in the fact that the —th Hussars were going to the same Presidency that Charlie was in, and that there was a possibility of that young scapegrace coming across his old comrades once more. Then Mrs. Connop, ever sanguine, began to speculate on the chances of Charlie getting back to his old corps, which she thought might be effected soon after the —th Hussars got out there, and Gilbert Slade had to explain to her that the War Office people wouldn't stand quite such a rapid shuffling

of the cards as that; then Charlie's affairs were discussed, and Mrs. Connop was very anxious to know if any progress had been made in their settlement, and was loud in her expressions of gratitude to Major Brad-dock for all he had done for him.

"It really is very good of him to trouble himself about Charlie's business at all," remarked the good lady; "in fact he don't deserve help or pity from any one."

"Uncle Bob is a real good sort," interposed Slade. "He took a fancy to your brother, you see, Miss Devereux, at first start, and although I own he was awfully disgusted at his having to leave the regiment, yet he is always staunch and true to those he has once befriended. I don't know what he has done about Charlie's business, but I shall see him to-night, and will come down to-morrow, and let you know all about it, and now I must be going."

"Why I've seen nothing of you," cried

Mrs. Connop ; “ I’ve not had time to ask you about this business of Mr. Furzedon.”

“ I don’t think there is any necessity for me to say more than I have done,” replied Slade, with a meaning glance at Lettice ; “ the papers will tell you all about it before a few weeks are over. Good-bye, Mrs. Connop, good-bye, Miss Devereux,” and as he bent over her hand he said in a low tone, “ You can’t think how happy you have made me,” and then, with a hearty invitation from Mrs. Connop to come to luncheon to-morrow, Gilbert Slade took his departure. Not half a score of words, and yet Lettice Devereux seemed quite as content as if she had received a more explicit declaration.

CHAPTER IX.

CHARLIE'S BAPTISM OF FIRE.

CHARLIE DEVEREUX was once more upon the war-path ; and he and his comrades, like baffled hounds, grew thoroughly savage in the pursuit of that perplexing marauder Shere Ali. That the famous dacoit chief can assemble some hundreds at his back should he so will was now well known to the authorities ; but that his influence through the Deccan is a thing that can be no longer borne with is a fact thoroughly recognised. It is true he rarely gathers together his followers in such numbers as he can command ; but that he can put himself at the head of a most formidable band at two or three days' notice is now perfectly under-

stood. His tactics are those of the old Highland veterans in our own country, who sallied forth upon their reiving expeditions, sped homeward with their plunder, and then rapidly dispersed.

Shere Ali makes similar outbursts in unexpected localities, and then, in like manner, disappears with his booty, and is apparently swallowed up in the adjacent jungles. The marauder, too, has acquired a strange notoriety through all that country. Information given detrimental to himself and his followers has several times been punished with swift and singular barbarity. The villagers are shy of any allusion to his whereabouts or proceedings; and his brigandage has attained such an extensive scale as to augur pitiful weakness on the part of any government that fails speedily to repress it. Even the veteran Hobson shook his head over it, and said, in the course of his varied experience, that Shere Ali was the most aggravating customer he had ever had to deal with.

"We have come across him once, Charlie," he said, as they jogged along one morning at the head of their now mounted men, "or else, upon my word, I should begin to think this was quite a legendary chieftain; but he and his rapparees *did* shoot at us once; and we were very close upon their track a few hours afterwards."

"Yes," rejoined Charlie Devereux, "and the massacre of poor young Blades and his escort was a startling proof of Shere Ali being very much alive and on the move; but the dream will come true, Hobson, I know it will; we shall come up with him at last; and then, if I know anything of the temper of our fellows, they will be rather hard to hold. They have hunted him for many weary miles, and heard so many tales of the atrocities of himself and his followers, that I don't think there will be much quarter given when the day of reckoning does come."

"No; nor *asked*," said Hobson. "You

will see these fellows will die grimly as a fox in a trap, and with a like snarl upon their lips. But, halloo ! what the deuce is up ? this looks like business of some sort." And, as he spoke, Hobson pointed to one of the advanced guard, who was riding back to them as fast as his horse could carry him.

" Now, Wilson, what is it ? "

" Sergeant Rivers sent me back, sir," replied the soldier, as he saluted, " to say that he thought we were pretty close upon these dacoit chaps, this time. There's a pretty sight when you get round the bend, sir ;" and the soldier pointed to the turn in the road.

" Pass the word to close up, and sound the attention, bugler," said Hobson. " Now, what's round the bend, Wilson ? "

" Well, sir, we must have pretty near caught these scoundrels at their hellish work ; there's a tolerably strong travelling party, some of 'em well-armed, too, who have been massacred to a man. The ser-

geant bid me tell you that he thought the dacoits must be in considerable force."

"Bring them on at a trot, Devereux, as soon as they have closed up; I'm going to gallop forward and see what has taken place yonder."

Accompanied by a soldier, Hobson galloped forward, and the minute he rounded the turn in the road the tragedy of the morning lay exposed to his view. About a score of men lay stretched upon the road, weltering in their blood; and the whole scene was easy of interpretation, as the sergeant in charge of the advance guard at once pointed out to Hobson. "These two men here by the side of the road were evidently the leaders of the party."

"Evidently Parsee traders," remarked Hobson, as he dismounted from his horse, "and the others their servants and an escort of soldiers, whom they had hired to protect them. They have apparently been

surprised and butchered to a man, without offering much resistance."

"Just so," replied the sergeant, "there is a stream just away to the right here, and Shere Ali's people must have come upon them while they were cooking their mid-day meal under the trees by it."

"I see; and these fellows fled into the open, and were all cut down before they could make any stand at all."

"They weren't all killed quite in that way, sir," replied the sergeant drily. "This Baboo here was murdered in cold blood, and tortured first; look at his fingers, sir."

"I sec," said Hobson, "it's an old trick of theirs, burnt nearly off; they've bound them in tow soaked with oil and then set fire to them; whether they've done it from sheer devilry, because they didn't get so much money as they expected, or quite as likely to wring information from him about his property, I don't know. Ha! the other fared very little better; you can see the

mark of the cord round his neck ; they half throttled him before they killed him."

" We can't have been very far from catching them in the very act, sir," said the sergeant.

" You're right, Rivers, these bodies are not yet cold. I don't believe these villains can be above three or four hours ahead of us, perhaps not even so much."

The robbers had done their work cleanly. All the animals belonging to the murdered party they had carried off with them, and the dead had been stripped of everything valuable about their persons. Nothing was left but the corpses of the two traders, their servants and escort, to tell the story of that day's cruel work. By this time the remainder of the troop had come up, and were surveying the scene with critical eyes. Old soldiers, most of them, who had been through the fell fighting of the Mutiny, and to whom the sight of a field strewn with dead was no novelty.

“ Not a wounded man amongst them,” growled one of these. “ These devils give no quarter, and, if ever we do come up with them, by —— ”

“ They can’t expect to get it. Look at that, too,” and the speaker and several of his comrades gazed curiously at the charred stumps of the hapless trader’s fingers.

“ Now, Rivers,” exclaimed Hobson, “ I’m going to push forward at once. On you go, with your advanced guard; keep your eyes skinned, and of course fall back the minute you get touch of the enemy. I suspect Shere Ali is at the head of a strong band this time.”

So little trouble had the robbers taken to mask their movements that the way they had taken was pretty evident. Some of the soldiers, too, by this time had become clever at scouting, and the best of these were riding in the advanced guard; a bare half-mile from the scene of the massacre, and it was evident that the marauders had left the

main road and struck across one of the jungle-trails to the right.

It was further pretty apparent, from the horse-prints, that they were in considerable numbers. Hobson had no doubt that, according to his wont, Shere Ali, having placed a hundred miles or so between himself and the scene of his crime, would disband his followers, with the exception of a trusted few, and then betake himself to his secret lurking-place, the whereabouts of which so completely baffled his pursuers; but its secret was well kept, and, so far, the Feringhees had got no hint of it. Hobson knew that so long as he was close upon the trail of his foe, and that Shere Ali kept at the head of a numerous band, he would not be difficult to follow; but so soon as he dispersed his rascallions there would be great danger of losing trace of him. It had happened so near half a dozen times to patrols who had deemed him within their grasp, and Hobson had no doubt that upon the one occasion he

and Charlie Devereux had stumbled upon the dacoit chief, Shere Ali had but a mere handful of men with him, and thence the ease with which the wily Indian had evaded him.

Keeping his men well in hand, Hobson plunged into the jungle and followed fast in the footprints of his flying foe. The men were all on the *qui vive*, with both eyes and ears alert for the slightest indication of the robbers. Every man of them knew that their ride must be both fast and far to give them any hope of coming up with the dacoit chief. The immunity he had so far enjoyed from the penalties of his crimes had been so far in great measure due to the celerity of his movements. He and his followers invariably fled from the scene of their murderous exploits by forced marches, and Hobson and his troop had been too long scouring the country in pursuit of him not to know that to capture Shere Ali involved beating him at his own tactics.

Silently they went on in the same monotonous jog-trot, for Hobson had sternly ordered that there should be no talking in the ranks, and impressed upon his men that their march must be conducted with as little noise as possible. Mile after mile was thrown behind them, and still the advanced guard reported "no glimpse of the enemy." Still the footprints of a large body of horses were ever in their front. Hobson's face wore an anxious expression, while young Devereux chafed inwardly at what he irreverently termed "the slowness of his captain."

If it had been left to him, he would have advanced at a hand gallop, the result of which would have been, that if he failed to come up with the foe in less than two hours the horses would have been about ridden to a standstill, while if he did succeed in overtaking them his men would have laboured under the disadvantage of being upon half-blown cattle.

However, Hobson had too much expe-

rience to fall into any such error. If his face wore a thoughtful expression it was because he was calculating how much longer he could jog along at the moderate pace he was going without pulling up to give men and horses a temporary rest. Experience had taught him that the dacoits managed to do with very short halts ; and he and his men would be, therefore, constrained to do the like. It was likely to be a severe strain upon both men and horses for six-and-thirty hours or more ; for perhaps two days and nights, he calculated, the whole party would have to do with very little rest. "As for the men," thought Hobson, "they must contrive to eat and sleep in the saddle, but pull up to bait the horses we must." Water, too, was becoming a very serious consideration. The men's water-bottles he knew must be pretty well emptied ; and then, again, what was to be done about the horses ? he had no idea where or when they would come upon it.

However, Hobson comforted himself with the reflection that water was as necessary to Shere Ali as to himself, and that the dacoits must know of a stream on their road. His mind was destined to be speedily set at rest on one point. Suddenly, shots were heard in the front, and the advanced guard were seen falling rapidly back. Sergeant Rivers hurriedly reported that they had come upon the rear of the dacoits, apparently unexpected by the latter. The marauders were marching in rather irregular and desultory fashion, but closed up and faced about the minute they discovered their pursuers.

“They mean fighting, sir, never fear,” said the sergeant, as he finished his report.

“Is there a large body of them?” asked Hobson.

“Rather difficult to say, sir,” replied the sergeant; “but they’ve formed across the road.”

“Mr. Devereux,” said Hobson, “take ten

files, creep round the jungle to the right, so as to take 'em in flank. I'm going to attack in front at once ; but nothing demoralises these black fellows like finding their assailants have got round their flank. You had better go with him, Rivers. One moment, Devereux, get well round, remember, almost towards their rear, before you attack ; never fear but what you'll get plenty of fighting."

Charlie touched his helmet; moved rapidly to the rear ; told off his score of men ; and then, accompanied by Rivers, plunged into the jungle. Hobson, without further delay, at once dashed at his enemy in front ; but the dacoits stood their ground, and evidently meant to offer a stubborn resistance.

The English soldiers had dismounted, and, in skirmishing order, had advanced rapidly along the road, and had spread through the jungle on either side of it. But the robbers were much too cunning to keep on the road ; they quickly resorted to the cover on either side of it, and the rattle of the musketry

became now continuous. Taking advantage of every tree, the soldiers closed rapidly in on their foes, but the latter apparently had no intention of meeting the Feringhees at close quarters. They retreated sullenly before them, at the same time yielding ground slowly and disputing it yard by yard.

Charlie Devereux meanwhile was doing his best to carry out his instructions, and, though the rattle of the musketry made both himself and his men impatient to take part in the fray, yet he resolved in his own parlance to "ride strictly to orders": which, however, were made the more difficult to carry out from the fact of the robbers falling back, and which were destined to end most unfortunately for Charlie. Shere Ali, flushed with the successes which had attended his late exploits, and finding himself—much against his will—brought to bay, determined, as he said, to read the Feringhees a lesson. His force very much outnumbered that of Hobson, and it had occurred to him to

put in practice the same manœuvre that his antagonists had employed. He had detached quite a third of his force, under one of his ablest lieutenants, with similar orders to those of Devereux. The result was obvious ; these two parties, each stealing round to fall upon their adversary's right flank, must come into contact. And Devereux and his party, instead of surprising the robbers, suddenly found themselves surrounded by the enemy in numbers of fourfold their own strength.

With a shout of "Follow me!" Devereux dashed straight at the dacoits with the intention of cutting his way through, and then falling on the flank of the main body in compliance with his instructions. But weight of numbers brought the English soldiers back, and the result of a few minutes' sharp fighting saw Charlie stretched senseless from a sabre cut dealt by the grim old Rohilla who led the enemy's flanking party. Sergeant Rivers, who was now left in command, made

two desperate charges in the hopes of at least carrying Devereux off with him; but it was in vain, the robbers were too numerous for him; and he was eventually driven back on the main body, with the loss of half his men.

But Hobson understood his business, and, as soon as he had become aware of the fact that his flank was turned, he fell back and rapidly showed a front in the direction of his fresh assailants; in short, the English formation speedily became that of a somewhat irregular square, and their leader confined himself at present to the defensive. Hobson and his men had not fought the Pandies for nothing; he had miscalculated the strength of his antagonists, and had not calculated upon Shere Ali's crafty manœuvre, but he laughed at the idea of the dacoits, however numerous, breaking his formation. In vain did Shere Ali urge on his men, and exhort them not to spare the infidel dogs, nor to leave a Feringhee alive to see the sun

go down. After one or two half-hearted attempts the marauders recognised that the Feringhees were a very tough nut to crack ; the deadly Enfields scattered havoc in their ranks, and they eventually recoiled, cowed and discomfited. Shere Ali gnashed his teeth with rage ; but he, too, was quick to understand that the massacre of a troop of English soldiers was a very different thing from that of a couple of soubadoors and their native escort. He drew off suddenly like a wounded tiger baulked of his prey. And Hobson took advantage of the lull to reckon up his casualties. It had been a sharp brush, and, though the dacoits were strewn pretty thickly on the ground, yet his own loss was considerable for an affair of this nature. He was much concerned to hear that Charlie Devereux had fallen, and no sooner were the robbers fairly in retreat than Sergeant Rivers and a party were sent out to bring in their officer. It was possible he might not have been killed ; and, at all events, it was

their duty to see they left no wounded behind them. But the dacoits had made sure work of the fallen, the wounded had been butchered where they lay. One thing only was extraordinary—Charlie Devereux, whether dead or alive, had disappeared.

Hobson looked very grave when it was reported to him that Mr. Devereux was missing. Anything was better than this. Shere Ali's ferocious character was well known; and even the men felt that their comrades who lay cold and stark in the jungle had met with a more merciful fate than was probably reserved for the officer who had led them. That he had been carried off by the dacoits there could be no doubt. It was hardly likely that they would have done this unless he had been alive. And the toughest veterans among them shook their heads ruefully over the sort of mercy that Shere Ali was likely to mete out to a captive in the hour of his defeat. Hobson's resolve was soon made; in half

an hour he was once more pressing on the footsteps of his retreating foe ; he was resolved to stick to Shere Ali's skirts till men or horses gave out. He would track this human tiger to his stronghold, or prevent his ever reaching it. In face of a very hot pursuit, it was possible that Shere Ali would think it best not to betray the secret of his citadel ; he was far too shrewd not to understand that once known his capture became a simple matter of a few days. The English could bring up force to overwhelm him in a marvellously short time. Hobson knew, moreover, that his own party was only one of a perfect chain of patrols, sent forth for the capture of the dacoit chief. "It was odds," he thought, "if he could not capture Shere Ali himself, he would succeed in hunting him into the hands of some other patrol of the cordon." And therefore he continued to hang upon the trail of the dacoits with untiring pertinacity.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. KYNASTON'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

BERTIE SLADE walked away in a very different state of mind from Onslow Gardens to that in which he had arrived there. What a fool he had been! ingeniously tormenting himself about Lettie's betrothal, when all the while no such engagement ever existed. Well, it was all right now, and he cared little what became of Furzedon, though he felt pretty certain that Norman Slade would take good care that righteous retribution was dealt out to him. Then he thought of how he had fallen into this mistake. He was quite certain that it was from Charlie he first heard of it; but he

remembered what Lettie had said, “that somebody must have put it into his head, for that her brother was the last man to arrive at such a conclusion from his own observations.” And then it flashed across him that he also had heard it from other lips. Mrs. Kynaston had told him the same story. Was it not possible that Charlie’s knowledge of his sister’s engagement had been derived from the same source? He turned this over in his mind as he walked along. Charlie was very thick with Mrs. Kynaston; and Bertie remembered well it was just after that flying visit of young Devereux’s to town that he told this bit of news. “And, by heaven!” muttered Bertie to himself, “I recollect now. He said he heard it from Mrs. Kynaston; and remarked how odd it was that he should have the first tidings of his sister’s intended marriage from any other but herself.”

Bertie Slade looked at his watch. It was early yet, he thought; he had still plenty

of time before dinner ; somehow he didn't seem to have half so much to do as he thought he had that morning. The fact was the important part of his business in town was already brought to a satisfactory conclusion. He ought to call and wish Mrs. Kynaston good-bye before he sailed. " I'd make any bet that this rumour was a bit of her handiwork ; but why ? What object could she have in setting such a report afloat ? I shouldn't fancy her a mischievous woman either." And still puzzling over Mrs. Kynaston's motives Gilbert Slade arrived at the little house in Mayfair, and was forthwith ushered into Mrs. Kynaston's drawing-room.

" Mr. Slade," exclaimed that lady, her eyes sparkling with genuine pleasure, " it is ages since I've seen or even heard of you. Sit down, do, and give an account of yourself."

" There is not much to be told," he replied ; " we got through the winter at York

pretty much as they always do up there. We hunted all day and danced all night; rode as hard as we dared, and valed as long as we could last."

"Well, you are not very much to be pitied. We had the hunting, of course, but as for our dances, they were as thinly spread as the butter of our childhood. And now I suppose you are up for some time?"

"On the contrary, I have but three days' leave; and, sad to say, have come to wish you good-bye; we sail for India in about three weeks."

The colour faded out of Kate Kynaston's cheeks as, in a low voice, she faltered out, "What is the meaning of this freak?"

"I don't know," replied Slade; "but it is a freak of the War Office, not of mine."

"What, the regiment is ordered out?"

"Yes, at monstrous short notice; and, as far as we can see, for no particular reason. Pray don't suppose I am very enthusiastic about it."

"Nor, I am sure, are your many friends," rejoined the lady.

"Amongst whom I trust I may reckon Mrs. Kynaston," said Slade.

"None truer, you know it," exclaimed Kate, extending her hand, and flashing a coquettish look at him from under her dark eyelashes, that might have provoked most men to philandering, if not to more passionate love-making. But Gilbert Slade's heart was steeled. Not only was he wholly devoted to another woman, but he held that Mrs. Kynaston was the originator of the report of Lettie's engagement, and had so caused him months of unhappiness.

"It is very kind of you to say so," he replied; "we all like to think there is some one who will miss us when we are gone."

"Yes; and I for one shall miss you very much. I have missed you so much during the long and dreary winter;" and, again, it was impossible for any man to mistake the challenge held forth to him.

“I am sorry,” he replied, “that I was unable to make my way into North Lincolnshire, but Charlie Devereux’s smash knocked that little scheme on the head. By the way, I had hoped to have seen his sister married before I sailed ; I suppose the wedding will take place before long, now.”

“I should imagine so,” replied Mrs. Kynaston, a little shortly. Was this man adamant, that he should reply to such an opening as she had vouchsafed him, by talking of another woman’s marriage ? “However, I have not seen Miss Devereux since the winter, and don’t think she has arrived in town as yet ; but never mind Lettie, tell me all about yourself. When do you go, and where are you going ?”

“I have told you already all I know about it ; further than that, the Madras Presidency is our destination.”

“It’s always the same,” replied Kate pettishly. “It is never any use making friends with a soldier ; all my favourites are invariably sent on foreign service.”

Strictly speaking, Mrs. Kynaston's charms, aided by her husband's weakness for play, had made foreign service a necessary change for more than one of her military admirers. Still, in this case no such sin could be laid against her. Gilbert Slade's acquaintance with Dick Kynaston was of the slightest; the Major had never invited him to touch either card or cue; and as we know, also, even in Charlie's case, Kate had told her husband outright that he must be allowed to pass scatheless.

“It's very good of you to class me in that category,” he said slowly at length. “It is odd, though, as an intimate friend of Miss Devereux's, that you should have fallen into the mistake of believing her to be engaged to Furzedon.”

She felt that her lie was detected; but it was little likely that a woman like Mrs. Kynaston would be put out of countenance by a trifle like that. “Oh dear!” she said

pettishly, “what have I to do with Miss Devereux’s engagements? I know she was, it’s quite likely she isn’t now. Girls of her age are quite capable of changing their mind.”

“I don’t think she has changed her mind,” replied Bertie. “I don’t think a girl like Miss Devereux would be long making up her mind about a man like Furzedon.”

“And pray what do you know against Mr. Furzedon?”

“I know,” replied Bertie sternly, “what I presume you know also, at all events, you do if you are in your husband’s confidence; you know his history, and you know the *exposé* that threatens him, and yet, knowing all this, you have never warned your intimate friend of the character of the man whom you supposed to be her *fiancé*.”

“I don’t understand to what you allude, Mr. Slade,” replied the lady, now thoroughly angry. “If you are desirous of discussing

Miss Devereux's affairs, you had much better talk them over with her. I am very likely misinformed about them."

"Perhaps so," said Gilbert; "or what is more likely you have thought fit to misinform other people. What has Miss Devereux ever done to you that you should persistently circulate that she was engaged to such a scoundrel? You need not deny it."

"I don't deny it," she cried, starting to her feet; "I would have done more than that to part you two. Bertie, are you blind? Can you not see? Don't you know you're all the world to me?" and in the intoxication of her passion she cast herself at his feet.

Gilbert Slade rose and his voice fell cold and stern on her ear, as in measured tones he replied: "You must be weak and hysterical to-day, or you would hardly talk so wildly. You forget it's but a few months ago that Charlie Devereux was your devoted

slave. Do you think you can whistle us all to your lure at will? You have endeavoured to come between me and Lettice, and while I live I shall never forget it."

She was on her feet and her eyes sparkled with fury as she motioned to him to go; and as with a bow, which under the circumstances seemed almost a mockery, he left the room, she threw herself upon the sofa, and grinding her teeth midst a torrent of passionate tears once more vowed Gilbert Slade should never wed Lettice Devereux if she could prevent it.

It was in a very happy frame of mind that Bertie sat down to dinner with his uncle at the Thermopolium, but still it cannot be said that he was overflowing with kindness to all humanity. For once the attractive Mrs. Kynaston had most thoroughly missed her mark, and far from subduing Gilbert had simply aroused a feeling of angry vindictiveness in his nature. It was not that he would have said a word,

or stirred a finger towards her woe, but he most assuredly would have felt little sympathy at any social discomfiture that might await her. He was not of a very soft or impressionable nature, and he did consider, as we know rightly, that she had occasioned him much unhappiness by the rumour of which she was the originator.

“ Well, Bertie,” said Major Braddock, as, having finished his soup, he raised a glass of sherry to his lips, “ so the old regiment is going to take a turn in the East. Good heavens ! ” he continued, putting his glass hastily down, “ look here, waiter, send the wine butler here at once. How dare you bring that sherry to me, Stephens ? ” he exclaimed, as that functionary made his appearance. “ It might have done for some of the very young gentlemen, but not for me ; it’s corked ; smell it.”

“ I’m sure I’m very sorry, sir,” replied Stephens ; “ I decanted it myself, and I detected nothing wrong with it.”

"Then you're not fit for your situation," retorted the Major sternly. "Change it at once."

"Certainly, sir;" and murmuring "I am always very particular about your wine, Major Braddock," Stephens retreated meekly.

"It's very, very slightly touched," said Bertie.

"I know that," rejoined the Major, "and there are plenty of men in the club who wouldn't have detected it was touched at all, but Stephens ought to know better than to try it on me."

Gilbert thought that he himself would probably have been one of those who would have not detected it had he been dining by himself, but he knew better than to interfere with his gourmet uncle until he had been pacified by a glass of sherry to which even he could take no exception.

"Well," said the Major, "India is a place to see, and your getting your troop just before going out makes it worth your

while. A captain really draws a decent income out there; after two or three years, if you don't like it, we shall no doubt be able to manage an exchange home for you."

"Thanks," replied Gilbert, "but I shall be home before that, I think. I'm as good as engaged to be married."

"The deuce you are," replied Major Brad-dock; "and who to, pray?"

"To Miss Devereux, Charlie's only sister."

"Ah! a very pretty girl, I've heard your uncle Norman say; but I say, Bertie, I trust she hasn't got her brother's talent for getting through money, or you will be clean broke before a couple of years are out."

"I think there is no fear of that," replied Gilbert laughing. "I must go out, you see, but as, for a wonder, we don't happen to have any war upon our hands, there will be no trouble about getting home again."

"Well, I always think soldiers are better unmarried," rejoined the Major; "still, when you've got your troop, I always said

you had a right to please yourself. I can only sincerely trust you will be happy. I know a little about old Devereux's affairs from looking after his son's. That girl will come into a comfortable little bit of money some day.” And then the conversation turned into other channels chiefly relating to the regiment, and which have no bearing on this history. Once only did Gilbert revert to the Devereux family, and then it was to ask if any steps had been taken about Charlie's difficulties. The Major briefly gave him an account of his interview with Jordan and Co. “The knowledge of who Jordan and Co. actually are is a trump card in our hands, for, sooner than face a court of law, I have not the slightest doubt Mr. Furzedon will abandon all claims to usurious interest.”

CHAPTER XI.

“ GOOD-BYE, SWEETHEART, GOOD-BYE.”

GILBERT SLADE made his appearance in Onslow Gardens a good half-hour before the luncheon hour; and Mrs. Connop, who hardly needed the hint that her niece vouchsafed her, had discreetly left the drawing-room to Miss Devereux’s sole occupation. If Gilbert had been somewhat vacillating yesterday, he came very directly to the point to-day.

“ You know what I have come for, Lettice. I have come to say plainly what I virtually said yesterday, and can only trust that, in my joy at finding you free, I did not read your feelings wrongly. Will

you marry me? I love you very dearly, and have done, I believe, ever since I first knew you; but it wasn't until I heard that lying rumour that I discovered how very much you were to me. Can you like me well enough to say 'yes'?"

Miss Devereux hesitated only for a moment, then frankly stretched out her hand, and said simply, "Yes, I will be your wife." An answer to which the victor at once replied by seizing the spoils of war, and pressing his lips to hers.

Then Miss Devereux sat demurely down, and motioned him to a seat by her side; and the conversation became, although extremely interesting to themselves, one that would read insufferably dull upon paper. There are some things best left to the imagination; and it is a question whether our own experiences don't suggest more to us than all books can tell. I don't think, beyond the fact that their marriage could not take place for some little time, they

gave much heed to future arrangements, which was, perhaps, as well, as it is difficult to say what changes a few months may make in one's plans.

When Mrs. Connop came into the room, Gilbert lost no time in telling her of Lettice's promise to be his wife. “Of course,” he said, diplomatically, “there are yourself and her father and mother to be consulted. As far as I am concerned, I am my own master. My parents are both dead, but I told my uncle, Major Braddock, about it last night——”

“How could you,” interrupted Lettice, laughing; “what dreadful audacity! You couldn't be sure I should say ‘yes.’ ”

“Pray don't think you were compromised,” rejoined Gilbert, gaily. “I only told him what I intended to do; that I had almost as good as asked you, and that I had hopes of a favourable answer. Well, Mrs. Connop, you know uncle Bob is a good sort; you know how he stood to Charlie.

Well, he wished me joy, and I feel quite sure my uncle Norman—he has seen you, remember, Lettice—will say the same in his own way. I only trust, Mrs. Connop, you can say the same on your side.”

“ My dear Mr. Slade,” replied that lady, in quite a little fluster of pleasure and excitement, “ you have both my most hearty good wishes, and I shall be only too charmed to welcome you as a nephew. I cannot, of course, answer for my brother ; but I don’t think it is likely that he will not be equally pleased to receive you into the family.”

“ Thank you,” replied Bertie, quietly, “ I always felt I could rely upon you, and I hope I have a satisfactory story to tell to Mr. Devereux.”

“ I have not the slightest doubt of it ; but now, young people, do come to lunch, you may not have time to be hungry, but I both have and am.”

A very merry party was that in the dining-room that afternoon. Mrs. Connop

insisted that the occasion required a bottle of champagne ; and, let devotees of the Blue Ribbon League rave as they will, that does impart a liveliness to conversation.

Things were discussed in a much more business-like way under the auspices of Mrs. Connop than they had been by the young couple in the drawing-room. And that Gilbert should go out to India and return within a year for the wedding was definitely settled.

“ Stop, I tell you what, Mrs. Connop,” suddenly exclaimed Bertie, “ I’ve got an idea. I must go back to York, because there’s such a deuce of a lot to do, and, though the chief is as good as gold about leave, it stands to reason the work must be done. Now I shall see awfully little of Lettice before I sail; if you wouldn’t mind it you would be real good-natured, and if Mr. Devereux says it’s all right, you might run down to Portsmouth and see us off.”

“ My goodness, Mr. Slade, that is rather

a startling proposal. I don't think I quite see my way to that."

"It's quite easy, I assure you, Major Braddock is sure to come down, and I will guarantee would be only too pleased to take charge of you. I'll take very good care that you get a line from him volunteering his services; and don't be afraid, Lettice, you won't be awfully well taken care of, as far as eating and drinking goes, while you're under his charge."

Miss Devereux and her aunt were both too well aware of the Major's pet weakness not to smile at this recommendation, and Mrs. Connop at length was induced to say "she would think it over, and, if possible, run down to see the last of him."

"Amuse you, I am sure, Mrs. Connop," said Gilbert; "a rather strange mixture are the good-byes on those occasions. If some of them are made with laughter and toast-drinking there are others made with tears and broken words. However, our good-bye

is not likely to be of that sort ; we are not going campaigning, and there is nothing to prevent our friends giving us a real cheery God speed.”

By the time this was satisfactorily arranged Gilbert discovered that it was time for him to go. He had two or three things yet to arrange before leaving town, so he bade his *fiancée* a hasty adieu, shook hands heartily with Mrs. Connop, dashed down stairs, and jumped into the first hansom he came across.

Her very unsatisfactory interview with Gilbert Slade had aroused all Mrs. Kynaston’s energies. It was possible that Miss Devereux was in town, although she had not as yet heard it, but Mrs. Kynaston determined that that was a point she would lose no time in clearing-up, and with this object the next day she drove down to Onslow Gardens to call upon Mrs. Connop, and arrived there a bare half-hour after Gilbert had left the house. She was not

surprised to find in answer to her inquiries that Miss Devereux was in town. Thinking the whole thing over, she had felt pretty certain, not only that she must be, but that Gilbert had seen her, and an understanding of some sort had been arrived at between the pair. Both ladies she was informed were at home, and she accordingly followed the servant upstairs.

Persistent believer as she had always affected to be in Miss Devereux's engagement to Furzedon, yet it had never occurred to Lettie to suspect Kate of having industriously set about the rumour, and therefore she was received with great cordiality. Mrs. Connop had never quite liked Mrs. Kynaston, but she was so elated by the event of the morning that she would have welcomed any one warmly. While, as for Lettie, she was only too pleased to feel that it was now in her power to convince her friend of the absurdity of the idea of her ever marrying Mr. Furzedon.

"I have been barely in town a week," said Lettie, in answer to Mrs. Kynaston's reproaches of not acquainting her with her own arrival. "I should have been round to see you in a day or two, but it was very nice of you to call to-day. You are always speculating on my marriage. Well, I have a bit of news for you. I am really engaged."

Mrs. Kynaston paused for a moment before she replied. Although expecting something of the sort, she was not prepared for an open avowal of the engagement. It was with difficulty she preserved her composure, as she replied, "Pray accept my congratulations, and don't be surprised at my not asking the name of the happy man. He came down to take a sentimental leave of me yesterday afternoon, and I have no doubt was engaged in paying a round of such visits. I pretty well gathered how his leave-taking here had terminated."

Lettice started as if she had been stung; she had had her tiffs with Kate Kynaston,

no doubt, but she did regard her as her most intimate friend, and had expected her congratulations would be both honest and thorough, but there was no mistaking the half-sneer in Mrs. Kynaston's speech, nor could any one fail to notice the cold half-mocking tones in which the conventional words were spoken. Mrs. Kynaston was a good actress, but for once in her life the blow had been too severe, and for the moment she had involuntarily dropped the mask. She repented almost as soon as the words had passed her lips, but for the minute she could not for the life of her have said otherwise.

“I don't think Mr. Slade had time to pay quite as many calls as you suggest, nor even if he did say good-bye to a few of his friends do I suppose his partings were quite of the character you describe.”

“Yes,” chimed in Mrs. Connop, sharply, “Lettie is a very lucky girl. Mr. Slade will get his troop almost immediately, and it will

all do very nicely ; at all events, we are very pleased with it, are we not, Lettie ? ”

“ And with good reason,” cried Mrs. Kynaston, who had by this time quite recovered herself. “ I congratulate you with all my heart, Lettie ; though,” she continued, with a comical little grimace, and a shrug of her shoulders, “ it is rather hard to have one of one’s pet admirers taken from one in this fashion.”

“ I can’t call to mind his ever figuring quite in that way as regards you,” replied Miss Devereux.

“ Now, don’t be touchy, Lettie,” said Mrs. Kynaston, laughing. “ It’s only my way, you know ; besides, he is formally declared your property now, though I am afraid you will see but little of him before he sails.”

“ We are to go down to Portsmouth and see the last of him,” said Mrs. Connop. “ He was always a great favourite of mine, and, as he says, ‘ this is only saying good-bye

for a few months,' and there is no fighting going on, so we've no cause to feel anxious about him."

" All very nice," rejoined Mrs. Kynaston, " but I must be going now. Good-bye, Lettie, I am sure I wish you every happiness, and you mustn't begrudge Mr. Slade having come to say good-bye to me. I am an old friend of his, you know. Good-bye, Mrs. Connop, early days for her to be jealous, isn't it?" and with a gay laugh Mrs. Kynaston sailed out of the room.

" And I thought that woman my friend!" exclaimed Lettie. " Did you ever hear anything like her, aunt? her congratulations were a mere mockery. Jealous! No, I'm not that; but Kate was doing, and would do, her very best to make me so, if she only had the opportunity."

" I never did like her," replied Mrs. Connop, " but as for the jealousy, my dear, it was all on her side. She is very much put out at your engagement, depend upon it."

Mrs. Kynaston had been unable to avoid betraying herself, though she would fain have done otherwise. She was too angry with the affianced pair to listen to the announcement of their happiness with patience. The rejection of her precious spikenard is a sore trial for any woman's temper, but the full measure of her wrath is sure to be reserved for that one of her sisters who brought such discomfiture about.

The brief interval soon slips away, and the gallant —th are in all the turmoil that the order for foreign service invariably evolves. The sale of their horses was, as is always the case, the worst ever known. Who cares to buy hunters at the end of the hunting season. As young Sparshot pithily remarked, “They wouldn't have lost much more, and it would have been far more graceful to have shot the lot in the barrack-yard, and sent them over to the kennels to feed the hounds they had followed so well.” Unsatisfied creditors thronged the barrack-

yard, excessively anxious for the settlement of their little accounts, or at least some security for them, occasioning much care and anxiety to those gay soldiers who had lived up to the traditional maxim, and “spent half a crown out of sixpence a day.” It is ever so; and, when great military authorities tell you that the army is ready for active service to the last buckle and gaiter-strap, I fear the officer’s private affairs are rarely taken into consideration. However, all these little difficulties are over at last, the sickly men have been cast by the doctors, the dépôt has been formed, and, leaving this latter behind them, the service strength of the regiment was duly trained down to Portsmouth.

That there should be no particular enthusiasm about their embarkation was but natural. They were not going out to take part in a big fight, nor were bands ringing out the spirit-stirring melodies which such occasions invariably give rise to; but for all

that there are always plenty of people who flock to see one of our British regiments embark, and start them on their voyage with a ringing cheer.

Upon arrival at Portsmouth the —th marched to the dockyard, where the “*Semiramis*” was lying alongside the quay. The gigantic steamship speedily engulfed them between her capacious decks, and then Gilbert had time to look round for those who had come to see him off. He had waved his hand to Lettie and her escort as he marched his troop on board, but as soon as the men had settled down he and several of his brother officers rushed ashore to welcome the friends who had come to see them off.

“Ah! Bertie, my boy,” exclaimed the Major, “glad to see they are sending you out like a gentleman. None of your beastly little tubs, but a slashing big ship. They tell me you sail at daybreak?”

“Yes, that is so,” replied Gilbert; “but come on board now, Mrs. Connop, ladies

always like looking round a ship, and there is a sort of nondescript meal will take place in the saloon within an hour."

"Yes," said Miss Devereux, "I should like to do that. Do you know the other day you quite forgot to tell me how Charlie's affairs were going on."

"So I did," replied Gilbert; "but you at all events must allow it was excusable."

"Well, never mind now. I asked Major Braddock about them as we came down, and he says they will be arranged before very long. Father will have to pay a good bit of money for him; but it's a great thing that he hadn't to leave the army."

"Yes," replied Gilbert; but here the conversation was interrupted by Major Brad-dock, who exclaimed "I am sorry to say we shall have to cut our leave-taking very short. The Captain has just told me, Bertie, that, though you don't what is called sail till daybreak, he is going to get his ship out of harbour at once, and anchor for the

night in the open water.” And here the warning cry of “ all strangers for shore, please,” smote upon their ears.

There is always a shade of sadness in saying good-bye on such occasions, and I for one hold that the “ sweet agony of parting” should never be unduly prolonged. Gilbert shook hands with Mrs. Connop and his uncle, clasped Lettie in his arms, kissed her warmly, and whispered into her ear, “ Don’t forget to write constantly, dearest,” and then handed her over to the Major’s charge. She stole her hand once more into his as she murmured “ God for ever bless you, dearest,” and leaving a small parcel in his palm tripped hurriedly across the gang-way.

When Gilbert unfolded his prize a little later it contained a gold locket with the monogram of “ L. D.” upon one side, while within was coiled a lock of Lettie’s chestnut tresses.

CHAPTER XII.

HOBSON RECOVERS THE TRAIL.

WHEN Charlie Devereux came to himself, he found himself being borne along in a rude palanquin, the property of the grim old Rohilla who had cut him down. He was dizzy, confused, and his head still swam a good deal from the sabre-stroke, the force of which, luckily for him, had been considerably broken by his helmet. He had lost a good deal of blood, but his head had been bound up for him roughly in a damp cloth. As soon as he could collect his faculties sufficiently he began to wonder what he had been spared for, and with the remembrance of that scene by the roadside he could not but fear

that it would have been better for him had he been slain outright. Soon he perceived that there was an animated discussion going on between two men, who were mounted on very good horses, and evidently men of note amongst the robbers. One he recognised at once ; it was the dacoit chief to whom he had been opposed, against whom he had stood foot to foot and sabre to sabre, with what dire results we have seen. The other was a little wiry man of middle height, and a countenance somewhat striking. You were puzzled at first to know what it was repelled you in it ; the man was well-favoured enough, but his fellows seldom saw him for the first time without his producing an uneasy feeling in their minds ; but at last it dawned upon you, it was the cruel, restless eyes. That his companion paid him considerable deference was apparent, but that it was Shere Ali himself Charlie was not aware until somewhat later. Could he but have overheard the tenor of their

conversation it would not have done much to comfort him as regarded his present position.

“ You were wrong, Hassam, to spare this dog of a Feringhee. Do you suppose this one life would save our necks if we fell into their hands ? No ; depend upon it, our lives are forfeited if ever they trap us.”

“ But I don’t counsel that his life should be spared altogether. For the present, yes, because we want some information from him. The pursuit of us has thickened, and there are now many more parties of the Feringhees scouring the country than there used to be.”

“ True, and this lot behind us, in spite of the warm reception we gave them, are by no means done with. We ought to have eaten them up this morning.”

“ True,” replied the Rohilla, “ but these children of Sheitan are obstinate as pigs, and moreover love fighting.”

“ You are right, Hassam, we will make

the Sahib tell us all we want to know as soon as he has a little recovered himself."

"And if he refuses to speak?" said the Rohilla interrogatively.

"It will be the worse for him," retorted Shere Ali. "We have ways to make men open their mouths he little wots of."

Hobson's determined pursuit, however, left Shere Ali small leisure for indulging his peculiar method of questioning a prisoner. If the dacoits halted for long, Hobson was sure to disturb them, and though, in consequence of their great superiority of numbers, he was cautious in his attacks, still he never failed to attack, and after a sharp skirmish Shere Ali and his followers were always again rapidly retreating. It was in vain the dacoit chief endeavoured to urge on his band to overwhelm their relentless foe. It was useless. The robbers, although they behaved well enough in a skirmish, could not be brought to face the Feringhees in real earnest. The pursuit had now endured

something like forty-eight hours, and, as Hobson recognised, could not much longer be maintained. Both men and horses were getting utterly used up, and the one ray of hope he had of ultimately capturing Shere Ali lay in the fact that the dacoits he knew must be getting nearly as beat as his own people.

Suddenly he began to suspect his prognostications were realised. They came to a place where from the main road two smaller tracks diverged through the jungle, and, as the scouts pointed out, from the footprints of the horses it was evident that the robbers here had broken into three parties. It was just what Hobson feared. Despairing of shaking off his persistent pursuit, Shere Ali had commenced to disband his followers. The hunted dacoit was evidently afraid to divulge the secret of his lair, and had probably after disbanding his men sought its shelter with but a few of the most trusted. Could he but come up with them now,

Hobson thought, his capture would be easier, as he had little doubt his own party far outnumbered that of the robber chief; but which of these three tracks to take? they had no peculiar mark by which to recognise the footprints of his horse from that of any other; it was a sheer toss-up, and after a brief delay Hobson decided to follow on hap-hazard. Two or three hours more steady riding: the men are nodding in their saddles, the tired horses blundering in their steady jog-trot, when suddenly they emerged from the jungle, on a broad highway which was instantly recognised as the main road from Secunderabad to Nagpore, and which way the party they had followed had taken, whether they had gone up the road towards Nagpore, or down the road towards Secunderabad, there was nothing to show. It was hopeless to carry on the pursuit further; a village could be descipted not a mile away, and where there was a village there was sure to be water. Hobson marched his

troop as far as the outskirts and then gave the order to his worn-out men to bivouac for the night.

At daybreak the next morning Hobson was awakened with the news that there were horsemen coming up the road. He received the announcement with but little interest, it was not likely that the dacoits would move for any length of time in any numbers along that road, and he guessed at once that it was only another patrol similar to his own. A glance through his field-glasses at once confirmed this, with the trifling exception that the new-comers were evidently regular cavalry, and not mounted infantry. When they had arrived within a very short distance the officer commanding them rode forward, and, addressing Hobson, said "I don't know whom I have the pleasure of speaking to, but I presume you are in command of one of the patrols in pursuit of this scoundrel Shere Ali. We are only just out from England, and have been packed off to join in the hunt."

“ Ah ! ” replied the other, wearily. “ I’ve been hunting him for months and months ; if I had but come across you twenty-four hours ago.”

“ Why—did you get news of him ? ” inquired the new-comer, with interest.

“ News of him ! ” replied Hobson. “ I’ve been at his heels and fighting with him these two days. Four times I’ve brought him to bay, but his numbers just saved him from destruction, and after a short skirmish he always bolted again.”

“ Both your men and cattle look as if they had had a gruelling,” said the new-comer, as he compared the travel-stained, way-worn appearance of Hobson’s band with his own trim-looking troopers.

“ Yes,” rejoined Hobson. “ I drove both my horses and men pretty well to a standstill yesterday. The worst is that crafty devil Shere Ali played his old trick on us to finish up with. He broke up his band into three divisions, each of which followed a different

route, and it has ended by our losing all trace of him."

"By Jove, what bad luck!" exclaimed the dragoon. "I wish to heavens I had come across you a bit sooner. By the way, do you know anything of a great friend of mine, who, like yourself, has been at this game for some months, one Charlie Devereux?"

"Devereux—my God! Yes; he is my subaltern," and Hobson's face became very grave and stern.

"Then I fancy you and I know each other perfectly well by name. I am Gilbert Slade, and, if I mistake not, you are John Hobson?"

"Yes, I've heard plenty about you; poor Charlie never tired of talking ——"

"Why do you say *poor* Charlie?" interrupted Slade, anxiously; "he has not been killed, has he?"

"No, worse than that has happened to him. I believe him to be a prisoner of

Shere Ali's; and you've probably heard enough of that monster's brutalities to know what that means."

Gilbert's face fell. All that side the country was alive with stories of Shere Ali's sanguinary doings.

"I am of course under your orders," he said at length. "I was told to patrol towards Nagpore, on my own account, until I fell in with some other patrol, and then to take my instructions from the officer commanding."

"Well, you can't do better than halt your men here, and breakfast. I must try and get some information out of these villagers before I move on. The worst of it is this scoundrel has created such a reign of terror that it is difficult to induce the villagers to disclose what they know. Generally, a lavish offer of rupees would suffice to make them betray any dacoit chief, but this Shere Ali has taken such ferocious vengeance on those whom he has detected giving

any information about his proceedings that they tremble at the very sound of his name; however, I have sent a sergeant to bring out the khotwal and any other of the leading villagers he thinks might possibly have information, and I must try if threats and bribery will do anything with them."

Gilbert Slade looked very grave when he heard that Charlie was in the hands of Shere Ali. It would have been a terrible thing to have to write to Lettie and tell her that her brother had fallen in a skirmish with a gang of dacoits, but it would be too terrible if his death should be preceded by the infernal cruelties practised by Asiatic robbers. No, he thought, if their worst anticipations were realised, his family should be at all events spared such knowledge.

It was not long before Sergeant Rivers returned, bringing with him some half-dozen of the leading men of the village, including its khotwal or headman.

"They all swear they know nothing, sir,"

said the sergeant; "but," he continued, dropping his voice, so that only Hobson and Slade, who was sitting by, could hear him, "here is a huckster among them who, I think, knows something, and might be brought to tell it if you see him alone."

"What makes you think that, Rivers?" inquired his captain.

"Why, when the interpreter had got them all together, and was cross-questioning them, this fellow's little eyes twinkled when he heard that many rupees would be given for any information leading to the capture of Shere Ali. Like the rest of them he swore he knew nothing about him, but he hung about the doorway, and as I came out of the khotwal's house he said in a low tone, 'What would the Sahib give to catch the dacoit chief?' I answered at once, one thousand rupees; but he shook his head and muttered, 'Not enough, it is too dangerous,' so I said to myself, I'll just bring you along with me, my man."

“ Quite right,” rejoined Hobson, “ I’ll see him in two or three minutes.”

“ Smart fellow that sergeant ! ” remarked Slade. “ Do you think he is right in his conjecture ? ”

“ Quite likely, he *is* a shrewd fellow ; he has been for many years in this country and understands the natives thoroughly — he speaks their tongue too a bit.”

The villagers were now brought one by one before Hobson, beginning with their headman, who was sternly informed that Shere Ali had been traced to their immediate vicinity, that there were a thousand rupees for the man whose information led to his capture, that it was useless to pretend that they had no knowledge of him, that the Government had resolved to make a severe example of the first village found sheltering or assisting him, and that he had little doubt they had at all events been guilty of this latter.

One by one they protested by all their

gods that they had no knowledge of this Shere Ali, that they loathed his very name, that he spread desolation on all the country round, and that they only hoped His Excellency would speedily deliver them from this wild beast who devoured them. One by one they were dismissed with a recommendation to make their way back to their own village, and a menace that they would live to pay the penalty of their obstinate silence.

“Dogs ye are, and dog’s deaths ye shall die,” thundered Hobson in eastern hyperbole. “Your tongues have defiled the truth, and you know that you have lied in your beards. Away, back to your village, and pray that I burn it not over your heads ere the week be past.”

“I say,” said Gilbert, as the discomfited villagers, having now permission to depart, slunk down the hill, “you are giving full play to your imagination, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” rejoined Hobson, laughing, “it’s the only way to talk to these beggars. I

have no doubt they know perfectly well where Shere Ali has betaken himself, but they are afraid to tell. Their own rulers would not only threaten all I have done, but thoroughly mean it. And I fancy in the early days of the century our own people would have done the same."

"Still," said Gilbert Slade, "you haven't got a bit of information out of them yet. What are you going to do with this last man?"

"Why, to tell you the truth," replied Hobson, "a good deal of all this bombast has been for his special benefit. You see he has been within earshot all the time, and has been purposely given the opportunity of speaking to his fellows after I have talked to them. We'll have him up now, and if I don't wring something out of him I must fairly own I'm beat, and the following of Shere Ali will become a mere matter of chance; and yet," he continued, lowering his voice, "there never was such

reason that we should follow fast upon his track."

The Bunnea or petty trader was now brought before Hobson, and replied to the latter's exordium by the same protestations of ignorance as his fellows, except that he was, if possible, even more profuse in such asseverations. Hobson listened unmoved until he had finished, and then said "Your lies are useless. You have asked what will I give to know where I can lay hands on Shere Ali. Men don't ask what you will give unless they have something to sell. You haggled at the price, and say it is too dangerous."

"My lord has been misinformed," exclaimed the Bunnea trembling with terror.

"I think not; unlucky for you if it is so. You had better listen attentively to what I say. I shall take you into the jungle with me. If I find Shere Ali you shall have two thousand rupees, and I can safely promise you need never dread his vengeance. If I

don't," said Hobson sternly, "I'll leave you in the jungle for the crows to feed upon."

In vain the wretched Bunnea prostrated himself at Hobson's feet, while the sweat streamed down his brow from absolute terror.

"Take him away," said the latter sternly, "and let him be closely guarded. We'll march in an hour."

CHAPTER XIII.

FURZEDON LEAVES ENGLAND.

NORMAN SLADE was by no means the man to let the grass grow under his feet in any matter of business, more especially when it came to bringing a criminal to justice, and that criminal one who had cost him a considerable sum of money. No sooner had he got a case against Furzedon complete than he exerted all the interest he possessed amongst the leading men of the Turf to induce them to make the Jockey Club take the matter up, and, averse though that august body were to taking cognisance of an affair that had happened so many months ago, and about which their verdict—whatever it

might be—could in reality make now no difference. The thing was done, stakes and bets had all been paid, and nothing they could possibly do could undo the transaction. Let it be never so great a fraud, let it be never so shameful a robbery, nevertheless it was a thing accomplished, it was a fact of the past ; and those who had profited by it must keep the gains, and those that had lost by it must abide by their losses.

Quite true, argued those who had taken up the case, but on the same principle what criminal would ever be brought to justice ? The murder is done, the felony committed ; the life cannot be restored, nor in most cases the goods recovered ; but that is accounted no reason why the perpetrators of either should go scatheless. Then, again, the Jockey Club sympathies were not much in favour of Mr. William Smith. That gentleman, with his coarse braggart tongue and inebriate habits, was constantly giving great offence and using the grossest language to their offi-

cials; except to those pecuniarily interested, his defeat at Epsom was matter of much gratulation. But the persistency of Norman Slade's friends prevailed, and it was at last decided that the case should be duly brought before the Jockey Club at the second Spring Meeting.

But when Slade marshalled his facts, had assembled his witnesses, and due notice was given to Ralph Furzedon of the charges intended to be preferred against him, and an intimation that if he did not disprove them the Jockey Club would have no other course to pursue but to punish such misdeeds to the extent of their power, an answer came back from his solicitor to the effect "That Mr. Furzedon had been suddenly ordered abroad for his health; that there was no chance of his return for some months; and that he must request that all proceedings should be stayed until his client's return; that he felt no doubt of Mr. Furzedon's ability to rebut them, but in the present

state of his health it would be impossible for him to return to England." This was conclusive; in a case of this kind it was useless to proceed against a criminal who not only refused to plead, but further was beyond the bounds of jurisdiction. Even Norman Slade—though a fierce malediction broke from his lips as he did so—admitted that it was useless to proceed against a man to whom the sentence of the court must be a mere form.

Furzedon calculated on this; if he kept well out of the way, the prosecution against him—so to speak—would be dropped. Even Norman Slade would throw up his brief when he found there was no criminal to place in the dock. Another year and the whole thing would be thoroughly forgotten; he might return to England. And though he felt that for a time he must eschew the race-course, much as he loved it, yet there would be no public scandal. It might be a little talked about in society, but pro-

bably only to a limited extent. Things of that sort were but a few days' wonder, and on his return people would be much more curious to know where he had been, and what he had been doing, than to recall that unsavoury story concerning him which was current about the time he left.

But, if Norman Slade was bitterly disappointed at Furzedon having slipped through his fingers, there was another upon whom it exercised a perfectly morbid effect. The hatred of years was concentrated in Prance's mind, that thirst for vengeance against the man who rightly or wrongly he accused of the ruin of his home and his life he had looked upon as about to be satiated, and now once again, after all his patience, toil, and trouble, had his enemy proved too clever for him. He quite pestered Norman Slade with his entreaties that he should persevere with the case ; it was in vain. Slade told him it was hopeless to think that the Jockey Club would go into such a by-gone matter,

unless the delinquent could be brought before them. Prance was wild at the idea of being baulked of his vengeance, and Norman could not but wonder what wrongs he had received at Furzedon's hands that had provoked such undying enmity. He remembered the man's fierce outburst in the Paddock at Doncaster when he had questioned him about what he expected to get for the information he proffered, and at the last interview he had with the half-frenzied man could not but think that he should not count his own life very safe was there a man walking about bearing such deadly hatred towards him.

On one point Mr. Furzedon was considerably out in his calculations. The history of his antecedents and misdoings was known to far too many people not to be pretty widely bruited abroad. Through club smoking-rooms and West-End drawing-rooms the story of how last year's Derby had been lost was freely canvassed, and that the chief

actor in that audacious robbery should have been one who had actually contrived to appear on the outskirts of society tickled society not a little. Young men who found themselves lifted into a temporary importance from the fact that they had happened to know Furzedon were cross-examined as to his personal appearance, and as to whether they really did not detect from his manner that he kept a shop. "So shocking, you know, and a pawnbroker's shop too!" that useful but retiring business being regarded in a sinister light by the fashionable world, who believe its dealings to consist chiefly of the receiving and disposing of stolen property.

Mrs. Kynaston, with her usual astuteness, at once made the most of such cards as Fortune put into her hand. She went about posing as a perfect martyr, a sorely-tried woman, whose burden was almost greater than she could bear. "It's terrible, my dear," she would exclaim plaintively to her intimates, "to think that we knew Mr.

Furzedon at all, but I am ashamed to say we knew him very well ; that's the worst of racing. Dick is so fond of it, and he does pick up such queer acquaintances on the Turf. The first intimation we had of it all was from Mr. Slade ; we didn't know him, but he knew that Dick and this dreadful man were mixed up in some racing transactions together, and so he called and told him what he had discovered. I need scarcely say Dick at once told Mr. Furzedon he need never expect to set foot in our house again ; but, if it is terrible for me, what must it be for poor Miss Devereux ? My heart quite bleeds for her, poor girl ; she was engaged to him, you know. I suppose it is all off now ? Poor Lettie, it is very sad for her."

The result of Mrs. Kynaston's wailings was that the report of Lettie's engagement to Furzedon, which had somewhat died away, was again revived, and it really ran a chance of having the effect that lady designed. No two men could be more

thoroughly up in the talk of the town than Gilbert's two uncles. They mixed in very different sets, and neither of them very much affected ladies' society ; but there is not much that goes on in the London world that is not freely discussed in club smoking-rooms ; and amongst these Major Braddock passed a great deal of his time, while at the chief rendezvous of the magnates of the Turf it was well known that the latest scandal is invariably served up red-hot, and Norman was a member of that *caravanseri*. In the ordinary course of events, neither Slade nor Major Braddock would have heard this rumour—the actors in it were not of sufficient importance in society to attract attention to it out of their own immediate circle ; but, thanks to the threatened charge against Furzedon, anything connected with him became of greater interest when, in due time, it came to their ears. Had they not both had some knowledge of Miss Devereux it was very probable that they would

have written to Gilbert to urge him to pause before taking to wife a damsel who had transferred her affections with such wondrous facility ; but, as it was, they saw no call for interference ; and so far Mrs. Kynaston's tattling resulted in nothing more than considerable annoyance to Mrs. Connop, who was constantly goaded to madness by the commiseration expressed by her friends about her niece's disappointment.

Prance, ever brooding over his wrongs, ever hating, ever thinking of this man, who had been his undoing, determined that he must see him, that he must jeer at him, flout him with his social downfall. Cunning and astute, he had known that, if his vengeance could be carried no further, the utter demolition of Ralph Furzedon's social pedestal would be very bitter to that gentleman, and a thing over which he could gloat with much satisfaction. For years he had hugged the idea to his heart of ruthlessly exposing Furzedon, of letting the world

know generally who and what this young gentleman was that it was so cordially receiving to its bosom ; to pitilessly expose the family from which he sprang ; the way in which he and his progenitors had earned their wealth ; but all this was small satisfaction unless he was there to exult over his victim in his downfall. He had waited patiently because he feared that nobody would pay heed to his allegations ; and it was not till he had tracked out Furzedon in a great Turf fraud that he deemed he could command a hearing. Well ! he had obtained it, and now in the hour of his victory Ralph Furzedon had fled from the consequences of his crime. Still, Prance was aware that, if he had not altogether succeeded in publicly exposing Furzedon, yet that he had done enough to ruin him socially. There had been plenty of paragraphs in the sporting papers with allusions to the grave charges impending against a young gentleman well known in racing circles. Later paragraphs

contained the news that the accused had left the country sooner than face the inquiry ; and further paragraphs said it would be absurd to conceal the name of the delinquent, and therefore published it boldly. But Prance wanted to see this man in his downfall, and exult over him in the hour of his defeat.

A lucky Aseot had put Mr. Prance in funds, and he determined to follow Furzedon abroad, and look at him ; as he said to Norman Slade at Doncaster money was to him as nothing to the luxury of revenge, and it was so ; it had become a mania with him ; he was quite prepared to exist on the bare necessities of life if he could only feast his eyes on Furzedon thrust out of all decent society, and driven to associate with a class of Continental adventurers little superior in position to him, Prance. Ha ! to see that ; to force his way into such a set, and to occasionally indulge in a gibe at the man who had struck him to the ground that night in

the Haymarket; ha! ha! that would be worth living for; to keep perpetually wondering how such a well-known turfite as Mr. Furzedon could be lingering abroad while Doncaster and Newmarket were going on. Ho! ho! what fun that would be. The man was really half crazy on the point of his inveterate animosity to Ralph Furzedon.

But to gratify these amiable instincts it was of course necessary that Mr. Prance should know whither Furzedon had betaken himself, and this was by no means so easy. Furzedon's dependants of all sorts were far too well trained to babble; and again, he was a gentleman who made no more confidants than were absolutely necessary. His valet he had taken with him; the old woman in charge of his chambers doubtless had no knowledge of his address; and, though both at his office in Northumberland Street and at the shop a few streets higher up the Strand they were sure to be

aware of it, yet Prance knew better than to suppose that he should obtain the information he wanted from them. How was he to get at what he wanted? and about this Prance was fairly beat; but he was a man accustomed to burrowing, to tracking and tracing things through dirty by-paths, to obtaining information, oft-times of very dubious value, in manifold queer ways, and though at fault for the present it was not likely that he would remain so long. A good hater, like a vengeful Indian, may be baffled for the time, but it is difficult to throw him altogether off the trail.

Mr. Prance cogitated over this for some time, and for the life of him could hit upon no solution to the problem; at last an idea struck him. Furzedon's letters were probably addressed in the first instance to the office in Northumberland Street, and from thence sent on to him by his confidential clerk. No sooner had he settled this in his own mind than Prance slipped down to

Northumberland Street about the time he knew the office would be closing. He loitered outside until he saw Mr. Sturgeon the head-clerk, whom he knew perfectly well by sight, come out and walk away. Then he rang at the bell, and the door was opened, as he expected, by the charwoman, who was about to sweep out the office. His covenant with her was short and simple. For a trifling consideration the contents of the waste-paper basket were to be carefully preserved and delivered to him daily.

For some days, carefully though Prance studied the torn papers that the charwoman handed over to him, it was with no result, but the clue was found at last. One morning as he went carefully through them he suddenly espied an envelope torn in two addressed to Mr. Sturgeon in Furzedon's well-known hand. The postmark on the envelope told him partly what he wanted to know. Furzedon, then, was at Brussels; but it was, of course, possible that he might

not be staying there under his own name. If the envelope was torn up it was likely that the letter inside it had been torn up too. He continued his search and soon discovered that this was the case. What the contents of the letter might be he cared very little about; but, for all that, he put the pieces together, and, as he anticipated, arrived at Furzedon's address. That gentleman's letters were to be forwarded to Henry Jackson, *Poste Restante*, Brussels. This was quite sufficient for Prance; with that clue to go upon he felt quite certain of speedily tracing his man to his harbour of refuge—and without delay the monomaniac started for the Belgian capital.

CHAPTER XIV.

LET HIM BE GIVEN TO THE FLIES.

CHARLIE DEVEREUX, meanwhile, who is hurried along by his captors in a manner that taxes his exhausted strength severely, cannot as yet complain of anything worse than being rather roughly treated. He could hardly expect much courtesy from men like his captors, more especially while they were being much harassed in their retreat by his comrades. It was quite clear to him that his life hung upon a thread—not on account of the Rohilla's sabre-stroke, he felt pretty confident he should get over that—but the scowling brows and menacing gestures directed towards him by the da-

coits after each of these little skirmishes between themselves and Hobson's troops showed too plainly that his hour might come any minute. In fact it was nothing but the influence of Hassam that had saved his life so far, and to what caprice he owed his intervention Charlie could not possibly conjecture. Jealously guarded, he could see but little of what went on, but the firing told him whenever Hobson and his men came up with their fleet-footed foe.

At last came a hurried halt, and Charlie made out that the robbers had broken up into three parties, that the one with which he remained was apparently under the command of the Rohilla, and what had become of Shere Ali Charlie was unable to ascertain. From this out Devereux heard no more of his own people. They might be still following the robbers for all he knew; but, at all events, their rifles were silent. Their road, as far as he could make out, seemed to grow deeper and deeper into the jungle.

Another thing that struck him was, that they were diminishing in numbers, and certainly soon after they broke into three parties they materially relaxed the speed at which they travelled.

His captors showed no disposition to converse with him, and indeed, as far as he knew, were unable to do so. Charlie had picked up but very little Hindostanee, and except from Hassam he had heard no word of English escape their lips. As for the Rohilla, Devereux suspected that he could speak English fairly well if he chose: so far he had confined himself to brief inquiries as to whether he suffered much from his wound, and to occasionally rendering some rough assistance in readjusting the bandages. At length they indulged in a halt of much greater duration than ordinary, and from various signs Charlie came to the conclusion that the robbers had now no fear of pursuit, and were besides nearing their destination. Hassam's band had dwindled down now to

little over a score—how or when the others had disappeared Devereux did not know, but they had been melting like a snowball ever since the dacoits had broken into three bodies, the fact being that the marauders were dispersing to their own homes, leaving behind them only the faithful few privileged to accompany Shere Ali to his stronghold.

Of all Shere Ali's subordinates there was none he placed more dependence upon than Hassam, and it is doubtful whether any other could have stood between young Devereux and his end but him. Even Hassam knew that he had purchased but a temporary respite for his prisoner, and it was open to question whether that grisly old marauder desired more; though by no means so cruel he was quite as ruthless as his chief, and held strongly to the creed that the dead tell no tales. He thought that a good deal of the information they wanted ought to be wrung from the young English officer, and that once got, well, it was as easy to give

him his passport for another world as not. The difference between the robber-chief and his lieutenant was this, the Rohilla would not hesitate to torture a captive to gain his object, but Shere Ali would torture his victims from sheer cruelty.

Devereux had by this time abandoned his palanquin, and been placed astride on a rough country pony, one of those clever wiry little "tats" who do a wondrous lot of work upon a minimum of corn. He noticed that they seemed to have plunged deeper into the jungle than ever, the very semblance of a road seemed to have been lost, and their path could only be described now as a mere track. Suddenly they emerged from the jungle upon a species of oasis upon the far side of which was a singular group of rocks, and around their base flowed a small watercourse, tranquil enough just now, but probably a torrent in the rainy season; beyond the rocks was more jungle. Before crossing this grassy oasis Devereux

had time to study this caprice of nature ; it looked like a natural citadel, of which the huge rock in the centre might be the key, and its smaller surrounding brethren the outworks. This was the stronghold of Shere Ali. Halting his men for a few minutes just within the verge of the jungle Hassam rode forward and discharged two pistol-shots into the air. Devereux looked on with much curiosity to see the result of the signal, for such it evidently was. Another minute and a single shot was discharged from the group of huge limestone boulders, and then Hassam and his party rode gaily forward.

The stream running in front of the rocks was easily fordable, and, having crossed it, they turned between two of the smaller boulders and ascended the rocky path which led up to the king-stone of this singular group. Devereux noticed that the smaller rocks were honeycombed with caves, partly natural, but many of them had evidently

been enlarged by the hand of man. At last they turned through a fissure in the side of the chief rock, which, to Devereux's great astonishment, instead of being solid, was in the centre hollow, after the manner of a tooth. Around this curious platform in the middle were the entrances to several caverns, all of which, though natural to begin with, had evidently been considerably enlarged artificially; in short the place had been in years long gone by a species of Buddhist monastery, now it was the home of the dacoit, and before then, perchance, of the tiger; where his priest had formerly invoked Buddha, now the victims of Shere Ali shrieked their lives out under the tortures this miscreant inflicted under pretext of extorting confessions of hidden hoards which they did not possess.

This natural fortress had evidently been the retreat of the robbers for some time; many of the caves had been turned into store-houses, and some of the larger ones

into stables, and it was quite evident to Devereux that, if they had only command of the water, a small body of men might hold out for a considerable time against much superior numbers. Still, that would avail Shere Ali little, let his stronghold be only once discovered ; and then Charlie reflected sadly how well its secret had been kept, and how long the dacoit chief had baffled his pursuers. He was thrust into a small cell with a stern intimation from Hassam that if he crossed its threshold without permission he did so at his peril. As far as he could make out, the place at present was occupied only by Hassam's party, and what had become of Shere Ali he was unable to conjecture : but he felt pretty certain that he was not within the citadel. He could see that the robbers maintained in their way a severe discipline, the Rohilla's word was obeyed without question by his strange medley of followers. The ruffianly crew seemed to have been gathered from men of

all races common to the Peninsula. There were some whose soldierly bearing gave good grounds for supposing they were among those who, like their leader, had been false to their salt during the past Mutiny, but many of them had probably taken to the road from their youth upwards. Food and water were furnished him with a liberal hand, and, though he was apparently but slightly guarded, Devereux knew that he was jealously watched; moreover, so far as he knew, the only way out of this singular amphitheatre was the narrow path by which they had entered, and two or three of the dacoits armed to the teeth lingered night and day about that. Still Charlie thought that if any feasible chance of escape presented itself he was bound to attempt it. He could but be killed, and that that would be his fate a little later he had no reason to doubt; in fact it puzzled Charlie why it was that his life was spared so long.

Their first day in the rocks the dacoits

seemed determined to compensate themselves for the fatigues of their late rapid march. They gave themselves up, after the manner of their kind, to eating and drinking, sleep and tobacco—usually the sole pleasures left to those who elect to live by preying on their fellows: the second day they were more on the alert, and Hassam more than once ascended a rough staircase which led to the top of the great honey-combed rock which formed their shelter. Devereux had gathered, partly from the few words he caught and partly from their gestures, that they were expecting the arrival of their leader; and when the afternoon sun sank low in the heavens the tramp of horses on the narrow path became plainly audible: a few minutes more and Shere Ali, with about a dozen followers, made their appearance on the rocky platform. Devereux was struck with what a very small number of the dacoits had gained their stronghold; he felt sure that they were in much greater

force when he and his comrades first came up with them. It was, of course, difficult to estimate their numbers in the jungle, but Charlie had believed that there were quite three hundred of them when the first attack was made, which had terminated so disastrously for himself. He did not believe that Hobson's incessant attacks had occasioned such loss as the disproportion between their present and then numbers might have been supposed to indicate. Then he began to speculate upon how Shere Ali's return would affect himself—little doubt, he thought, but what his fate would be speedily determined now; then he wondered whether his comrades were still upon the track of the marauders. He reckoned that Hobson could only have about fifty men with him now, for several he knew fell in that first skirmish; and it was not likely that others had not shared the same fate in the succeeding ones. Shere Ali had between thirty and forty with him, and the natural defences of

the place were such, that, even if tracked to his lair, the struggle between him and his assailants would probably be both bloody and protracted.

Devereux was kept but little time in suspense; half an hour after the dacoit chief's arrival in his citadel his cave was entered by some half dozen of the robbers, and he was roughly escorted into the presence of Shere Ali. The bandit's face wore its most savage expression. Hobson's stubborn pursuit had irritated him not a little, and his fury had been thoroughly roused by finding it hopeless to induce his followers to fairly face the hated Feringhees. He had led them on, himself, twice in the most resolute fashion; for, merciless though he was, he possessed the attribute of animal courage. But, as it had been in the Mutiny, so it was now; and, in spite of preponderance of numbers, the Asiatic could rarely be induced to face the Englishman hand to hand.

He was sitting at the door of the cave

which he retained as his own private residence, surrounded by Hassam and four or five more of his principal lieutenants. A gleam of ferocious exultation flashed across his face, and the savage dark eyes lit up with devilish cruelty as he fixed his gaze upon Devereux.

“ Ha ! ha ! ” he laughed at last ; “ so this is the dog of a Feringhee you persuaded me to spare, Hassam. Your arm grows feeble, old friend ; your sword was wont to do its work cleaner. Answer me this, Englishman : not as you hope to live, but as you hope to escape agonies that will make you welcome death as a boon and a blessing. How many parties of your hated race are there out in pursuit of me ? ”

Devereux made no reply.

“ Dog, do you hear what I say ? ”

“ A soldier answers no questions put to him by the enemy ; and an Englishman knows how to die.”

“ And an Asiatic knows how to kill.

Fool ! before the morrow's sun has set you shall pray to your gods for death. Away with him, and let him be *given to the flies.*"

Charlie Devereux was in mereiful ignorance of the horrible death to which Shere Ali's ruthless words consigned him ; in a trice he was seized, conducted down the narrow pathway, carried some two hundred yards out into the little oasis, on the edge of which the rocky citadel stood. There he was stripped ; and then, his captors having driven some short stakes into the ground, they proceeded to bind him hand and foot to the said stakes, the result of their labours being that Devereux was left stretched flat on his back on the ground, with his arms extended after the manner of a man crucified, unable to move hand or foot, and with only the power of slightly turning his head. That done, with a brutal laugh the robbers retreated into their own stronghold.

Devereux speedily began to realise the horrible death to which the dacoits had

consigned him; the sun was almost down, so for the present he was spared the tortures of the fierce glare that must to-morrow shine down upon his upturned face; but Charlie quickly became aware that the jungle was alive with creeping things, for which his defenceless form had become a playground. The stings, the bites, and the irritation caused by this army of flies, mosquitoes, centipedes, &c., gradually became maddening, and as the night wore on the fever occasioned by it naturally excited a terrible thirst, a frightful craving for water, than which there is no infliction more hard to bear. With the hours of darkness came the bark of the jackal; and soon Devereux became conscious that several of these creatures were not only at hand, but were stealing cautiously up to him as a subject well worthy of investigation. He could have cried aloud almost in his agony, but he grimly swore the dacoits should not have that satisfaction; and then he realised Shere

Ali's threat. He felt that he was strong yet, and that he could look forward to hours of thirst and this frightful irritation before death released him. Every bone in his body seemed to be one prolonged ache, from the enforced inability to shift his position. He felt that the jackals were coming nearer and nearer ; they were smelling at his feet ; every moment he expected their sharp teeth would meet in his flesh. Suddenly came a sharp yap from one of their number, who was still some little way off. Another second, and they were scuttling away in all directions. What had alarmed them he could not guess, but at all events he was relieved for the present from one of the horrors of his position.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ROCKS OF RUGGERBUND.

At the expiration of the hour bugle and trumpet rang out “boot and saddle”; the mounted infantry and dragoons at once, under Hobson’s orders, turning upon the former’s previous tracks, once more plunged into the jungle, carrying with them the unhappy Bunnear as a captive.

“I am going back,” said Hobson, “to the spot where I was beat and lost all trace of Shere Ali. The road there splits into three paths, the one of those three paths that we followed brought us on to the main road; I am convinced that Shere Ali was not with that party. That band, I should imagine, dispersed as soon as it

touched the highway. It is little likely that they would have dared travel in the force they were along the main road to Nagpore. Had they turned the Secunderabad way you must have met them."

"Quite true," said Slade, "and I am perfectly sure no such body as half a score has passed us on the road."

Hobson smiled; he had not passed years in hunting Pandies, Rohillas, Dacoits, and all such riff-raff for nothing. He had not much faith in these newly-arrived English dragoons when their wits came to be pitted against the subtlety of the Asiatic.

"This leaves us," he continues, "a choice of two roads; which of those two I am to follow depends upon that Bunnear's decision. Charlie Devereux's life hangs upon a thread, and by the living God if I arrive too late I'll keep my word with that miserable huckster."

"You surely don't mean that you'll put in force what you threatened?" said Gilbert.

“ You are new to these people, Slade. You can’t quite understand what we went through during the Mutiny times. And your eyes are hardly open yet to what may be poor Devereux’s fate unless our help comes speedily. You don’t know, perhaps, so much of this Shere Ali and his doings as we who have been hunting him for months. If I was sure that wretched huckster was withholding from me the information I require, I would flay him alive. As it is, if he tampers with me in any way he shall never leave that jungle alive, for I’ll shoot him with my own hand.”

Gilbert said nothing, but he was tortured with the idea of what poor Charlie’s fate might be, and recognised at once that his leader was one of those stern determined natures that thoroughly understood his savage foe, and was perfectly competent to cope with him.

The Bunnear in the meantime, arrant

knave and coward as he was at bottom, was not quite plunged in that abyss of despair and terror that he pretended. Frightened he was, no doubt. He was of a timid and a cautious nature. Nothing but the greed of gold had led him to open his lips to the extent that he did before Sergeant Rivers. He could not resist asking what was the reward of treachery. He could not help, with all his trading instincts upon him, seeking to know whether what he had got to sell would not fetch a still higher price. He had got his answer; he had found it would fetch double. It may be still questioned whether he would have had the courage to be tempted even by so high a bait, but the white sahib had peremptorily taken the whole thing out of his hands; he was a prisoner, and threatened, with all sorts of pains and penalties if he did not divulge what he knew. On the one hand was the terrible vengeance of Shere Ali, on the other immediate punishment by the

white Sahib should he refuse to do his bidding. Cunning, though cowardly, the more the Bunnear turned the thing over in his own mind, the more convinced he was that the betrayal of Shere Ali tended most to his safety and profit. If he guided the Feringhees to the stronghold of the robbers, the result would probably be the capture of the great dacoit chief, and then he thought the band might be so effectually broken up that he would have little to fear from their vengeance. Then again, was he not offered two thousand rupees to point out the way? His mouth watered at the bare idea; yes, decidedly he would speak.

When, upon arrival at the place where the three roads met, Hobson ordered his prisoner to be once more brought before him, and sternly demanded which of those roads led to Shere Ali's place of refuge.

Prostrating himself at Hobson's feet, the Bunnear exclaimed, "If my lord will hold to his promise, give me the two thousand

rupees he has promised me, and then let me go free, I will tell him all I know."

" You shall have the reward and go free the minute you have led me to Shere Ali's fortress, and I have convinced myself that he is still there ; where is he ?"

" My lord, the dacoits are concealed in the rocks of Ruggerbund, and the path to the right will lead you to them."

" The rocks of Ruggerbund," exclaimed Hobson ; " it is odd I never heard of them, and yet I thought I knew all this country well, too."

" They were famous many hundreds of years ago, and it was said many holy men lived in them, but they are little known now."

" Do you think that fellow is speaking the truth ?" said Slade.

" Yes. At all events it will be the worst day's work he ever did if he is not ; take him to the front, Rivers, and now let us push forward as quick as we can."

After some hours' riding the party arrived at the open plain on the further side of which rose the curious rocks of Ruggerbund. Hobson instantly ordered a halt under cover of the trees, and then, after surveying the brigand's stronghold through his field-glasses for some minutes, gave orders that men and horses should keep themselves carefully concealed, and above all that there must be no noise.

"That's a very tough nut to crack, Slade," he said, pointing to the rocks, "and Heaven knows how many of his rascallions that scoundrel Shere Ali has got with him, but we must have it at any cost."

"My fellows are downright wolfish to get a chance," replied Gilbert; "they know that their old officer is in the dacoits' hands, and your men have been enlightening them a little upon the way Shere Ali treats his prisoners."

"Yes," rejoined Hobson, "there's no fear but what they'll come on fast enough when

they're wanted ; the first question is, what is the best chance of saving Devereux's life, the second, how to carry that place with as little loss of life as possible."

"To save Charlie's life is the main thing. I suppose your fear is that they'll murder him the minute they catch sight of us."

"Just so ; the sun is all but down, and I think our best chance will be to steal across the open in the dark, and then to rush the rocks at the first glimmer of daybreak."

Anxiously did Slade and Hobson sweep the half-mile of open that separated them from the rocks. They could see the robber sentinel on the summit of the king rock as clearly as possible. Their men were silent, watchful, and observant as themselves. They knew that Mr. Devereux's life depended on the rapidity and dexterity of their attack. He had been popular with both corps, and the mounted rifles had in addition a long score of weary marching and counter-marching to reckon up with the human tigers

whom they had at last tracked to their lair. The sun dipped below the horizon with that plunge that characterizes his setting in the East, and it was night ; lit up as yet only by the fireflies, and sung only by the trumpeting of the mosquito and the chirruping of the innumerable insect tribe. The stars twinkled slowly forth, but there was no moon ; moreover, a declivity of the ground sheltered the doings of the robbers as they emerged from the base of their citadel ; the consequence was that, keenly as the eyes of his friends had scanned the intervening space between them and the Ruggerbund rocks, they could see nothing of Devereux's so-to-speak crucifixion. There he lay staked to the ground literally within their sight, had it not been for the darkness. Then came the rising of the moon, the bark of the jackal, and the melancholy wail of more than one of the denizens of the jungle, to break the silence of an eastern night.

“ We must wait till that confounded

moon is down," said Hobson ; " and as soon as it is I shall creep across with my men, in skirmishing order, and be as much round the far side of those rocks as I can before daybreak. We must both leave a few men behind to take care of the horses ; you'll then bring the main body of your fellows, massed just in rear of my centre. At daybreak you and your men must carry the entrance to the main rock. I shall immediately collect my men together, and follow on to the fort."

"All right !" said Gilbert, quietly. " We shall get in, never fear ; at all events, if my fellows are beaten back, you may look upon it I'm past praying for."

A single hand-grip was exchanged between the two men, and then came that tedious business of watching for the disappearance of the moon, as they had watched for the setting of the sun.

All orders were given, and every man amongst the little command knew exactly

what was expected of him. At last the moon waned, and gradually died out. The thick darkness which precedes daybreak covered the plain as Hobson and his men, emerging from the jungle in skirmishing order, crept stealthily across it. Some fifty yards behind their centre came Slade at the head of his dismounted troopers. Slowly they stole forward, and there was no sign that the robbers had any conception of their presence. Suddenly the word was passed in muffled tones up the line that the Captain was wanted.

“What is it, Rivers,” inquired Hobson, in a low tone, as that active non-commis- sioned officer, who had been leading the skirmishers on the extreme right, at last gained the centre.

“We’ve found Mr. Devereux, sir,” ex- claimed Rivers, in an awe-struck whisper.

“Alive?” asked Hobson, anxiously.

“Yes, sir; the devils seem to have treated him shamefully. He’s a bit off his head, and a case for the doctors; but——”

“That’ll do,” interposed Hobson, sharply; “pass the word to halt along the line; now take me to him.”

When Hobson came to where his men had discovered Charlie he found his luckless subaltern in a high fever, and wandering in his talk. The soldiers had, of course, at once severed his shameful bonds; but, weak from his previous wound, the misery and tortures of his horrible position had proved too much for him. Fever had come on, and he was now talking wildly and at random. A fierce malediction broke from under Hobson’s moustache as he learned in what state Charlie Devereux had been found. “Carry him back at once,” he said, “to the shelter of the jungle; and—ha! sureiy that is the first streak of light: before the sun is well up we will settle with those hell-hounds inside.”

Once more the word was given to advance, when suddenly a shot from the rocks told that they were discovered. “Forward

the stormers ! ” rang out Hobson’s voice, in reply. “ Keep your men well in hand, Captain Slade, till you are close up to the rock ; and then, good luck to you ! Sound the fire bugle ; ” and in another instant a score of rifles rang out at the half-dozen dacoits visible against the sky-line in the dim grey of the morning.

Slade and his men in the meantime marched rapidly across the short space that intervened between themselves and the fissure in the rock, now plainly visible. They suffered but slightly, for the hot fire kept up by Hobson’s sharpshooters prevented the dacoits from effectively using their muskets on the advancing foe.

“ Now, lads, follow me ! ” exclaimed Slade, as, waving his sabre, he dashed up the pathway followed by his troopers, but the wasps’ nest was by this time thoroughly aroused, and at the first bend of the road where the path enlarged a little they were confronted by Hassam. Quick as thought Gilbert

rushed at the Rohilla, and a fierce and furious mêlée at once occurred between the dacoits and the troopers, sabres flashed and revolvers cracked for a few minutes. At the end of that time Hassam found that he had encountered a more formidable foeman than Charlie Devereux. Young, powerful, and a good swordsman, with the advantages of height and reach, the contest between Slade and the Rohilla was short, and Gilbert passed his sword through the latter's body, just as he felt something like the sear of a hot iron about his own ribs.

At the fall of Hassam the robbers gave way, and Gilbert and his troopers followed close upon them, so as to give them no chance of reforming, but they soon rallied under the command of another chief, who now suddenly appeared upon the scene. Gilbert, who was under the impression that he had slain Shere Ali when he ran Hassam through the body, was somewhat puzzled at this new apparition, but the English slowly

won their way upwards despite the desperate resistance of the dacoits, now led by Shere Ali in person. By this time Slade and his men had fought their way into the little amphitheatre which formed the interior of the king rock, and there a terrible struggle took place between the soldiers and the bandits ; looking upon it as hopeless to ask for quarter, they died like rats in a trap, showing their teeth to the last. Shere Ali and some six or eight of his men were all that were left. Once more Gilbert, his sabre red with carnage, rallies his men for a last charge. As he dashes in at their head a bullet from the robber chief's pistol smashes his sword-arm, which drops useless by his side. Shifting his sabre to his left hand, Gilbert still cheers his men on—suddenly Shere Ali springs back into the mouth of a cave to which he has been driven and disappears ; another minute or two and Slade and his troopers pour into the cave in pursuit of the daring chief

whom they now have no doubt is Shere Ali himself. It is difficult at first to penetrate the obscurity of the cave, but when they do it is empty. In vain do they peer and poke their way into the darkest recesses of the cabin, their prey has escaped them, it seems as if the earth has swallowed Shere Ali.

Suddenly a wild English hurrah, followed by a shot or two, breaks upon the morning air. The sounds come from the outside of the rock, and, though not exactly knowing what they mean, Slade trusts that it heralds the capture of the dacoit chief. He had seen nothing of Hobson since he gave him orders to storm the rocks. That sagacious veteran, having much experience of the wilieness of dacoits, had suspected that they had probably an exit from their citadel on the far side. Detaching half his men to Gilbert's support he had at once crept round with the other half to watch the narrow strip of open that lay between the rocks and

the jungle on that side ; his craftiness was rewarded, for some few minutes after the firing had ceased inside the rock which proclaimed that Slade had overcome the garrison, some bushes parted, and from a fissure which they concealed appeared the robber chief. Discharging his pistols in the face of his foes, the robber made a determined dash for the jungle, but a rifle bullet in the leg stretched him on the ground, and the notorious Shere Ali was at last in the hands of his pursuers.

CHAPTER XVI.

PRANCE'S VENGEANCE.

SAM PRANCE, on his arrival in Brussels, had but a vague idea of what form his vengeance was to take. He wanted to find Furzedon ; he wanted to taunt him over his social discomfiture ; to jeer at him, and to gloat over his humiliation ; to proclaim it as far as possible before those who for the present might be Furzedon's associates : but further than that he had as yet conceived no plan. Brooding over his wrongs had, no doubt, warped the man's mind ; he had set his heart upon seeing his enemy thrust off the Turf. His failing to accomplish that end, to which he had striven so hard, had turned his very

soul to verjuice. There remained for him now but one thing to do, to avenge himself on the man who had ruined his life, and to taunt him ere consummating that vengeance, as the Indian squaws do the brave that is tied to the stake. The first thing to do was to discover where Furzedon had taken up his abode; and that to a man of Prance's researches was not difficult. It was but to watch the *poste restante* daily. He had a very fair knowledge of Furzedon's habits, and could make a rough guess as to within what hour he would be likely to call for his letters. Two—three days elapsed; but on the third the patient watcher was rewarded; Ralph Furzedon entered the post-office, and after a few minutes emerged again, thrusting his letters into his coat-pocket as he did so. It was easy from thence to follow Furzedon to his own lodgings over a shop in the *Montagne de Cour*; and that point once ascertained Prance felt that he was master of the situation. It was easy for him now to keep

watch and ward over Furzedon's outgoings and incomings: to follow him to his favourite restaurant, to trace him to his accustomed haunts, and to choose his own time for publicly denouncing him as a Turf-outlaw, who dare not show his face in England; and from that out—utterly unknown to himself—Furzedon's steps were perpetually dogged by this pale-faced monomaniac. Prance, as such men do, was simply nursing his opportunity; he chuckled to himself at the power he possessed, at the knowledge that he could bring the object of his hatred to shame at any moment; as an epicure dallies with a dainty dish, so did Prance linger over his revenge. The great *exposé* could come but once; he so gloated over the idea that he could not make up his mind to precipitate it. Habited in decent garments, and knowing so well that the truth of what he had to allege was a thoroughly-recognised fact by the majority of the racing world, even if not proven, it never occurred to

Prance that it was possible that the word of a nobody like himself might be pooh-poohed when put against that of a wealthy man like Furzedon. Nursing his revenge, still chuckling in his heart at the moment when he was to expose the plausible author of his ruin, day by day Prance dogged the heels of his quarry. He had found out the restaurant that Furzedon chiefly affected, and in which he seemed to have established himself as the head of a little clique, and a great authority on all matters connected with "*le Sport*"; and there he decided that he would snatch the mask off the impostor, and let these gentlemen know that the man they bowed down to dared not show his face on Newmarket Heath. Mr. Prance had money in his pocket, and the *Restaurant des Trois Aigles* knew no distinction of persons. As long as you were decently dressed and had napoleons in your pocket, any vacant table was at your disposal. The evening came at last which Mr. Prance had

marked out for the discomfiture of his enemy. Strolling in a little before the time at which Furzedon usually dined, he took a table in his immediate vicinity ; and then, taking a chair in the restaurant, awaited the course of events. He had not to wait long. As he expected, Ralph Furzedon and three or four of his intimates shortly made their appearance ; and, entering the restaurant, took their places at the somewhat elaborate table prepared for them. The party were apparently English. At all events their conversation was conducted in that language ; and it was quite evident that Furzedon was one in authority amongst them. Prance averted his face as they moved up the room, and, sitting with his back to them, escaped Furzedon's notice.

It was curious how his intense longing to avenge himself on his enemy had mastered his better judgment. He had always felt that for him to denounce Furzedon would

be useless ; that gentleman would simply laugh at him as the pariah of the betting-ring he was ; but the disappointment he had experienced when Furzedon left the country had churned his hatred up to very madness. He with difficulty contained himself until the *convives* were in the ~~midst~~ ^{midst} of their dinner : he sat trembling with passion, and nervously emptying glass after glass of wine in his excitement. At last he could bear it no longer, and, springing to his feet, exclaimed, “ Gentlemen, you don’t know the sort of blackguard you’ve allowed to sit at table with you. That scoundrel,” he cried, pointing to Furzedon, “ is a horse-poisoner, a man-poisoner, a fellow that, if he had not fled from England, would have been kicked off the Turf. Gentlemen in England don’t speak — ” but here the flood of Mr. Prance’s eloquence was interrupted by a wine-glass, which was shivered on his forehead ; and in another second Furzedon, springing to his feet, peremptorily called

upon the waiters to “put that drunken thief out of the place.”

By this time the commotion had attracted the attention of the whole room. That the landlord and his servitors should at once take part against the stranger was only natural. Furzedon and his friends were well-known customers, who spent their money lavishly. Bleeding, struggling, asseverating, Mr. Prance speedily found himself thrust into the street, with a strong intimation that any further disturbance on his part would result in his being handed over to the police. Furzedon turned round with an easy smile to his companions, who were all more or less of racing tendencies, and said, “A broken-down welsher, with whom I have a long-standing quarrel. I’ve had him put out of the Ring on two or three occasions. I don’t know what he is doing here; but if he has come over for the races, I can only advise you,” he concluded, laughing, “not to bet with him.” It need

scarcely be said that this incident, if it were possible, still further intensified Prance's animosity: he brooded day and night over his imaginary wrongs, and speedily arrived at the conclusion that his injuries must be avenged by his own right hand. From that out he dogged Furzedon like a shadow; wherever he went Prance, shrinking discreetly from notice, was watching him; he dogged him his lodgings at night; prowled on his footsteps, whether at the opera or the dinner-table, ever watching his foe with fierce, malignant eyes, waiting patiently within convenient view of the door, when Furzedon disappeared into buildings into which he deemed it inexpedient for him to follow. Norman Slade might well say he shouldn't care to have so vindictive a foe at large were he in Furzedon's place. He was right, for since he had been flung out of the restaurant *Prance was always armed.*

He had quite made up his mind, he was

determined to kill Furzedon as soon as a favourable opportunity was vouchsafed him. When a man resolves to slay his fellow, and is utterly reckless of his own life, nothing short of marvellous good fortune can save the doomed victim. He is, perhaps, more at the murderer's mercy in the very centres of civilization than in the wild plains of Western America, in the desert, or in South Africa. In these latter cases he is ever on his guard against enemies; but in the capitals of Europe one hardly expects to carry one's life in one's hand. But Furzedon was a man of gregarious habits; he was seldom alone, and for some days he unwittingly avoided attack from this circumstance. At length he received a letter from Mr. Sturgeon, desiring instructions about some rather intricate business matters that had just cropped up; and, with a view to thinking them well over, Furzedon lit his cigar, and started for a walk on the outer boulevards.

The pale grey shadow of Thanatos stalks

behind us from our cradle, but at what distance it is mercifully not given us to know. Sometimes, when deemed near at hand, years may elapse before he claims his own. At others when exulting in the full pride of our strength he is at our very heels with upraised hands. Little dreamt Furzedon as he crossed the threshold of his lodgings that bright summer morning that the Destroyer had marked him for his prey, and was rapidly closing in upon him. Prance was as usual on his ceaseless watch, and had followed after his wont on the steps of his foe, more doggedly resolved than ever to make an end of this man at the earliest opportunity, and utterly careless of what the consequences might be to himself. One thing only he hesitated about, he knew that physically Furzedon was the more powerful of the two, and whether really courageous or no he further knew that at all events Furzedon was not afraid of him. Prance's sole fear was a fiasco. The bare

idea that an attempt to kill his enemy might result in such discomfiture as we have seen twice befell him at Furzedon's hands made him wince again. No; there must be no mistake about it this time—a life for a life he was willing to give, but Furzedon must die. Stealthily he kept his victim in view, as he had done scores of times in the last two or three weeks, and for the first time saw him with savage exultation betake his way to the comparative solitude of the boulevards. Furzedon walked moodily along, puffing at his cigar, with his hands behind him, absorbed in thought. He had come out to think, and he was busy at it—no thought of Prance had crossed his mind since the scene at the restaurant; he had never caught sight of him since, and would have scoffed at the idea of such an outcast being able to work him harm.

This opportunity had come at last, and, though not flinching for one moment from his purpose, it seemed to Prance not quite

so easy of accomplishment after all. The boulevards, although thinly peopled, were of course not deserted ; it was easy to keep Furzedon in view, but at the same time to approach him closely was to run the chance of immediate recognition. He slunk along about fifty paces in the rear, but, tightly as he clutched the pistol within his breast, he never dreamt of risking a shot at that distance.

“ Pshaw !” he muttered to himself, “ have I not waited days for this chance? have I turned coward? is my nerve failing me? It is time to make an end of this,” and, quickening his pace, Prance rapidly though stealthily drew near his unconscious victim.

Not above a dozen steps behind him now, he drew the pistol from his breast, stopped, and was about to shoot his enemy down from behind, when from sheer accident Furzedon turned suddenly in his walk, and confronted him face to face. For a second Prance hesitated, but Ralph Furzedon, what-

ever else he might be, was a man of courage and decision. He recognised Prance ; he saw the pistol, and took in the situation at a glance. This man meant to kill him. Quick as lightning he dashed in at his foe, determined to close with him, and neutralise if possible the power of that pistol. Prance hurriedly fired at him, and Furzedon felt that he was hit ; the second bullet whistled past him at such close quarters that it was a miracle it only went through his hat instead of his head ; and then Furzedon closed with his assailant. He was but slightly wounded, and was far the more powerful man of the two. The struggle between them, if brief, was desperate. The one was battling for his life, the other mad with the lust of revenge ; but Prance's pistol-hand was powerless now. Once more, indeed, the revolver cracked harmlessly in the air ; and then Furzedon succeeded in wrenching it from his antagonist's hand and throwing it away ; but he stuck to his man with the pertinacity of

a bull-dog, and in another two or three minutes had borne him backwards, and the pair fell to the ground together—Prance undermost. All the brutal passions of Furzedon's instincts were aroused, and with his clenched fists he rained a shower of blows on the unhappy wretch's countenance, and speedily made it hardly recognisable.

“ I've a great mind to kill you, you cowardly hound,” he growled, between his set teeth. “ I've a right to do it; you did your best to murder me. Don't dare to get up till I tell you.” And as he spoke Furzedon rose from the body of his prostrate foe, and, stepping two or three paces back, began to take stock of what damages he had received in the encounter.

Already a small crowd, attracted by the shots, were hurrying to the scene of the conflict. Deeming his foe disarmed, and a little distracted by the ejaculations and questions rapidly addressed to him by the new-comers, Furzedon took his eyes off his

assailant, who had by this raised himself to a sitting posture. Suddenly Prance sprang to his feet, and drawing a knife from his breast threw himself upon Furzedon, exclaiming with almost a shriek, as he buried his knife twice in Furzedon's chest, "Done my best to kill you; not yet, but I will now." And as Furzedon fell lifeless to the ground he flourished his blood-stained weapon in the face of the horrified spectators, and then with a burst of maniacal laughter buried it in his own throat.

CONCLUSION.

THE fray was over, there was nothing now but to reckon up the cost and fruits of victory. The dacoits had died hard, and fought like wild cats in their rocky den, and the state in which Charlie Devereux had been found had not inclined the hearts of the soldiers to mercy. There were marvellously few prisoners, and amongst Slade's troopers the casualties also had been heavy. It had required all Hobson's authority to save Shere Ali's life, and the robber chieftain had good reason to feel little grateful for his preservation ; he knew it was forfeited, and thought rightly it would have been as well to make an end of it amidst the rocks of Ruggerbund, sword in hand, as to

be hanged in the face of the multitude, which fate he was well aware was in store for him. The doctor's report too was somewhat serious; he told Hobson that many of the wounded were bad cases, and it was desirable to get them within the shelter of a regular hospital as soon as might be. "Captain Slade," he continued, "will soon be all right, his arm is broken by a pistol-shot, and he has one or two slight flesh wounds. It will be some time before he recovers the use of his sword-arm, but one can feel easy about him. I only wish I could say as much for some of the others."

"What about young Devereux?" asked Hobson anxiously.

"Ah! that's serious," replied the doctor, "it must be a touch and go thing with him; he seems weak as a rat from his wound, which has never been properly attended to, and these wretches have driven him into a raging fever to wind up with. It is a question whether he will have strength to pull

through that; anyway, the sooner I can get my sick back to the cantonments the better."

Hobson had accomplished his mission, and after giving his men a few hours' rest, and thoroughly ransacking the robbers' stronghold, he started with his prisoners and wounded for the nearest cantonment, where he received much congratulation on his capture of the ferocious bandit, whom a military tribunal shortly relegated to the death he had so well deserved.

Charlie Devereux's battle for life was long and painful. More than once the doctors thought he was gone, and nothing but the most unwearied care and attention snatched him from the very jaws of death. When at last the delirium left him he was so weak, so utterly prostrated in mind and body, that the doctors unhesitatingly agreed that there was nothing for it but to send him home.

"Let him go round the Cape," said the

medical officer who had principal charge of him. "A long sea-voyage will do more to set him on his legs than anything else," and as Gilbert Slade, though doing well, was still unfit for duty, it was arranged that the two friends should proceed to England together.

"Good-bye, Devereux," said Hobson, as he shook hands with his subaltern. "English air, and especially English beef, will soon put you all to rights. My dream wasn't quite accurate, which I attribute to the fact of my never having seen Shere Ali. It was however most unpleasantly near the truth."

"Yes," said Charlie, with a faint smile, "I was destined to be cut down by a dacoit, and whether it was Shere Ali or one of his lieutenants made little difference."

The news of Furzedon's death offered a facility for the arrangement of Charlie Devereux's affairs, which Major Braddock at once took advantage of. Furzedon's heirs had no desire to continue the bill-

discounting business, and were only too glad to accept the money due to them, with a reasonable rate of interest. That Mrs. Kynaston gave free vent to her malicious tongue, and would have prevented the marriage of Gilbert Slade and Lettie had she been able, it is needless to say ; but, for all that, the two were made man and wife a few months after the former landed in England ; Charlie Devereux being sufficiently recovered to enact best man on the occasion. The breakfast took place at Mrs. Connop's house ; and, as that lady had consulted Major Braddock on the occasion, it was pronounced a great success ; that distinguished officer having thrown himself into the affair with great energy, and been at immense pains to see that the champagne was of an unexceptionable brand, and “not that usually kept for wedding breakfasts, my boy.”

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